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**CHRISTOLOGY IN CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DIALOGUE: THE HERMENEUTICS OF
INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE FOR THE PROMOTION OF COMMON VALUES.**

By:

Afayori Robert

**This thesis has been submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirement for a Postgraduate
Masters in Philosophy (MPhil) Degree in Systematic Theology.**

THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH



School of Divinity

Edinburgh, Scotland

2015

DEDICATION

In Memory of the Rev. Dr. Michael Purcell

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I wish to use this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to all who have in many and diverse ways contributed to helping me complete this work.

I particularly want to thank Aid to Church in Need (ACN) for helping me pay part of my tuition fees. I will like to thank the School of Divinity scholarship committee for paying the substantial part of these fees and the Ian Baillie Grant through Mrs Sheila Baillie. Your immense support is deeply appreciated.

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Last but not least, I will like to thank my family for their prayers and moral support throughout this period, particularly Mrs Margaret Haddad and Mr Philip Afayori. May God richly bless you all.

DECLARATION

This thesis which is written by Robert Afayori is entitled; “Christology in Christian-Muslim Dialogue: The Hermeneutics of Interreligious Dialogue for the Promotion of Common Values”. It is submitted to the College of Humanities and Social Science, University of Edinburgh for a Masters in Philosophy degree in Systematic Theology.

I therefore hereby declare that the thesis has been composed by me, that the work is my own except where clearly indicated, that the work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification. Information obtained from others is acknowledged in text and/or in the references.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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Insert the abstract text here - the space will expand as you type

Christology is one of the most contentious subjects in Christian-Muslim relations. While Jesus Christ is construed as the “Son of God and saviour of the world” in Christianity, Islam conceives him as a “prophet of Allah” without divine connotations. Whereas in the past Christianity viewed this Islamic image of Jesus as a “new form of heresy” which had to be sanitized by force, if need; Islam also rejected the Christology of the Christian Church as pure distortions and falsifications. In this context of “claim and counterclaim” is the identity and mission of Jesus Christ situated – common to both religions, yet divided between them.

While some scholars think that Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology is impossible because of the stark differences in their christological understandings, we argue that such dialogues are possible if they are organized against the backdrop of dialogue as an exercise in learning from and about the other. Dialogue as an exercise in learning negotiates the contentions that characterize the “claim and counterclaim” paradigms of Christian-Muslim relations by its emphasis on learning from and about what the other. We shall propose comparative theology and Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self as the theological approach and the hermeneutic framework which support this form of dialogue.

Comparative theology is viewed here as the critical correlation of the theological themes, concepts and practices between two religious traditions with the view to deeply learn and

understand them, and hence be enriched by this learning. It is a conversation with another tradition which eventually becomes a conversation with the home tradition. Hermeneutically, whereas we shall argue that these forms of conservation are best guided by Ricoeur's concept of *attestation*, Ricoeur's notion of *narrative identity* also shows how in narrating the story of our lives, we find that others contribute to our narratives and we theirs. We shall argue that these narrative *intertwinements* serve as the basis for the possibility of fruitful engagements between the self and the other in contexts where they are considered estranged.

From this hermeneutic perspective, we shall demonstrate on the one hand, how Islam and Christianity possess symmetrical and dissymmetrical narrative discourses on Christology, and on the other, how these could serve as contexts for learning. Whereas this learning may lead to the profound knowledge of oneself, the authentic knowledge of the other and mutual interrelationships between Christians and Muslims, dialogue as an exercise in learning could also lead Christians and Muslims to the discovery and promotion of common values such as *prayer and submission to God, peace and peaceful co-existence and solidarity with the poor and the marginalized*. These values are considered common to them because they are inspired by the message, the life and mission of Jesus Christ the "prophet of Allah" and the "Son of God." Key Words: *Christology, Dialogue, Comparative Theology and Hermeneutics*.

Lay Summary of Thesis

The lay summary is a brief summary intended to facilitate knowledge transfer and enhance accessibility, therefore the language used should be non-technical and suitable for a general audience. (See the Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study, General Postgraduate Degree Programme Regulations. These regulations are available via: <http://www.drps.ed.ac.uk/>.)

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Christology remains one of the most contentious subjects in Christian-Muslim relations. While Jesus Christ is construed as the “Son of God and saviour of the world” in Christianity, Islam conceives him as a “prophet of Allah” without divine connotations. Whereas in the past Christianity conceived the Islamic image of Jesus as a “new form of heresy” which needed to be sanitized by force, if need; Islam ultimately rejected the Christology of the Christian Church as full of distortions and falsifications. Within this context of “claim and counterclaim” is the identity and mission of Jesus Christ situated – common to both religions, yet divided between them. In the light of the stark differences in their christological understandings, some scholars have argued that dialogue between them is impossible.

In this thesis, we argue that Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology if it is constructed against the backdrop of dialogue as an exercise in learning from and about the other. Dialogue as an exercise in learning negotiates the contentions that characterize the “claim and counterclaim” paradigms of Christian-Muslim relations by its emphasis on learning from what the other has to say about Jesus Christ from their tradition-specific contexts. We shall argue for comparative theology and Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self as the theological approach and hermeneutic framework which support this form of dialogue. Here, comparative theology is viewed as the critical correlation of the theological themes, concepts and practices between two religious traditions with the view to deeply learn and understand them, and hence be enriched by this learning. It is a conversation with another tradition which eventually becomes a conversation with the home tradition.

Through these conversations, we shall demonstrate how on the one hand, Islam and Christianity possess symmetrical and dissymmetrical narrative discourses on Christology, and on the other, how these could serve as contexts for learning. It is this learning which would lead to the discovery and promotion of common values such as *prayer and submission to God, peace and peaceful co-existence and solidarity with the poor and the marginalized*.

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PART ONE
INTRODUCTION AND THESIS METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of The Study

In the world today most of the religious clashes, confusions and conflicts according to Douglas Pratt, are born from unexamined conflicting religious ideologies and unresolved mutual misunderstandings and thinking.¹ If an ideology can simply be understood as a set of beliefs, values and opinions which shape the way a person or group of persons act, behave, interpret and understand the world, then unexamined conflicting ideologies that precipitate religious conflicts need to be examined and clarified. Conflicts between religions as a consequence of ideological differences are well known phenomena in our world today. For instance, the 1994 tribal conflict in Ghana between the Konkombas and Chumburus (largely Christian) on one the hand and the Dagombas, Nanumbas and Gonjas (largely Muslim) on the other is a sad story to recount. This tribal conflict which arose as a result of disagreements between two people from the different tribes, metamorphosed into a religious conflict between Christians and Muslims in the area and led to the death of thousands of people. Tsikata and Wayo report that 2,600 lives were lost, not counting those unregistered and the properties involved.² Peace, which is an essential value of every meaningful religion was thrown overboard for war. The recent religious conflicts in Nigeria, Sudan, Iraq and Indonesia are but few examples. Religious conflicts have devastating effects on life, property and development.

Overcoming the ideological differences that trigger religious conflicts in our world today through interreligious dialogue is therefore a dire necessity. As Pratt puts it, “for dialogue to proceed in the hope, if not expectation, of a productive outcome, then the misapprehensions of the past, together with the prejudice of the present, must be addressed

¹ Douglas Pratt. *The Challenge of Islam: Encounters in Interfaith Dialogue*. 2005, p189-190

² Tsikata Dzodzi & Sein Wayo. “Identities, Inequalities and Conflicts in Ghana.” 2004, p46

in a climate of mutual and reciprocal correction”.³ If interreligious dialogue is to succeed in this area, then there is the need for the development of constructive theological paradigms of dialogue which can creatively engage Christians and Muslims in dialogues where shared religious experiences and theological exchanges can lead to the dialogue of life and the dialogue of common action.

Within the context of Christian-Muslim relations, “Christology” is one of the most contentious theologico-doctrinal constructs that places the two religions in diametrical opposition to each other. Whereas Muslims believe that Jesus was only a “prophet of Allah”, Christians maintain that Jesus Christ is the “Son of God”. Islam has constantly refuted this Christian perspective on Christology both in the Qur’an (Surah 4: 171) and the Hadiths as blasphemy. For the Christian Church, the Islamic perception of Jesus Christ as a “prophet of Allah” is heretical and must be condemned. Consequently, the contours of their relations have been one of claim and counterclaim. As a result, Gaudeul intimated that Islam and Christianity shared the same universe at a point, “but mentally they lived in different worlds and, as time went on, the mental universe of each society grew more impervious to the thinking, the values... and indeed the whole universe of the other”.⁴

Today, dialogue between the two religious traditions has helped to establish openness between them to some extent. Islam is no longer exclusively perceived as a “Christian heresy”, but a religion in its own right.⁵ Despite the Qur’anic rebut of the Christian believe in Jesus Christ as the “Son of God” (Surah 4:171), there is growing openness between Christians and Muslims about the need for dialogue as a means of establishing mutual understanding between the two religions on Christology. These dialogues are possible because the Qur’an has its own narratives about Jesus Christ which could be brought in conversation with the Christian accounts of him. Besides, Jesus Christ plays distinctive roles within Christianity and Islam as the “Son of God” and the “prophet of Allah” respectively. His distinct identity and significance in these two traditions

³ Pratt, Douglas. *The Challenge of Islam*. 2005, p191

⁴ Jean-Marie Gaudeul. *Encounter and Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History*. 1990, p191

⁵ “The Church has high regard for Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to men” (*Nostra Aetate* #3).

presents him both as *bridge and barrier* between them. We shall argue that it is the subject of dialogue which helps clarify this dialectic of bridge and barrier.

It must be admitted that though significant scholarly work has been done in this area,⁶ most of these do not specifically addressed the subject of Christology as a context for Christian-Muslim dialogue for the promotion of common values. For instance, Mark Beaumont's work on *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims* focuses on the critical analysis of Christian presentation of Christ to Muslims in the 9th and 20th centuries. Beaumont acknowledges the contentious nature of Christian-Muslim relations within these two epochs, due to the Christian belief in the divinity of Christ and the Islamic denial of it.⁷ He asserts that these denials brought about three forms of Christian reactions. Firstly, Islam was regarded as a false ideology which had to be silenced by an aggressive policy of propagating Christian truths without considering the views of Muslims. Secondly, Christians distanced themselves from Muslims to avoid any communication with them. Thirdly, the Church attempted to "take Muslims seriously as people of good faith whose views on Christ need to be understood and related to in genuine attempts to make sense of Christian faith to them".⁸

Beaumont's approach therefore follows this third response; the interest to avoid defiant proclamation and complete indifference by presenting the Christian Christ in a way that Muslims will understand.⁹ However, does not dialogue build on mutual sharing with the goal to mutually understand the dialogical other? What about presenting an "Islamic Christology" in ways that Christians will understand? Beaumont's work lacks this side of the dialogue.

In his work on "The Portrait of Jesus in the Qur'an",¹⁰ Hans Kung underscores the fact that the Qur'anic portrayal of Jesus as a prophet must be understood independently

⁶ See Kung et al. *Christianity and World Religions; Paths to Dialogue*. 1993, p109-127; Jacques Dupuis. *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue*. 2002; Mahmoud Ayoub. *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue*. 2007, p187-243; Mona Siddiqui. *Christians, Muslims & Jesus*. 2013; Leirvik, Oddbjørn. *The Image of Jesus Christ in Islam*. 2010.

⁷ Mark Beaumont. *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims*. 2005, p1, 7-8

⁸ Mark Beaumont. *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims*. 2005 p2

⁹ Ibid, p2

¹⁰ Hans Kung et al. *Christianity and World Religions; Paths to Dialogue*. 1993

from all Christian sources and interpretations and situated within the Qur'an's overall theological vision. According to Kung, "from whatever source the information about Jesus maybe derived, all the texts have been unmistakably stamped by Muhammad's intensive prophetic experience of the one God".¹¹ So the Qur'anic portrayal of Jesus should be interpreted against the stand-point of the Qur'an and not from the New Testament or the council of Nicaea. He emphasizes that Christians should not try to either co-opt Muhammad or Muslims as "anonymous Christians" against the Muslim self-understanding of the uniqueness of their Islamic identity.¹²

Whereas Kung's views here are considered laudable, he however advocates a Christology from below as the best approach to Christian-Muslim dialogue. For Kung, a functional Christology i.e. one "from below" that sees Jesus as elevated to a position of divine authority should be the theme of modern Christology rather than an ontological Christology i.e. one "from above". As Beaumont puts it, Kung considers that "the incarnation was an apostolic overlay of the much more modest claims of Jesus of Nazareth, who was proclaimed son of God only after his death and resurrection".¹³ Consequently, Kung argues that the Gospels reveal Jesus not as a man who promoted his "own person, role or dignity, but God's kingdom, God's name, God's will, which man is to fulfill through service to his fellow men and women".¹⁴ In this way, Kung forgets that just as the image of Jesus in Islam needs to be understood within the overall context of Muhammad's religious experience, so also the Christian perspectives on Christology have to be understood against the background of the overall experience of Jesus by the Apostles who believed in him as the "Son of God" and "Saviour of the World". Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology must not forget this tradition-specific understanding of Jesus Christ.

In his 1972 scholarly essays on "The Dialogical Relationship between Christianity and Islam",¹⁵ Hassan Askari (an Indian Shiite writer) also presents an interesting

¹¹ Ibid, p110

¹² Hans Kung et al. *Christianity and World Religions; Paths to Dialogue*. 1993, p110

¹³ Beaumont, Mark. *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims*. 2005, p191

¹⁴ Hans Kung et al. 1993, p116

¹⁵ Hasan Askari. "The Dialogical Relationship between Christianity and Islam" in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*. vol. 8 (1972)

contribution to the debate on Christian-Muslim dialogue on Jesus Christ. Here, Askari sees Christ as a “common sign” for both Christians and Muslims.¹⁶ As a *sign*, Jesus directs both Muslims and Christians to the true God they seek to serve. As a person, he reveals the deep relational character of religion, liberating man from his dead circle of monological religion and restores unto him his genuine dialogical relation.¹⁷ Thus, Askari suggests that dialogue between Christianity and Islam is the best way to solve their monological impasse. Though he acknowledges that the process may involve anxiety and pain, he nonetheless believes that it is the best way for them to come to better understandings of God.

Askari’s approach to Jesus Christ as a “common sign” between Christians and Muslims appears to be laudable. However, careful thought on such an appeal reveals that it attenuates the Christian understanding of the identity of Jesus Christ. To say that Jesus is a “sign directing Christians and Muslims to God” means that Jesus Christ is not God in himself, because a “sign” always points to something beyond itself. But for Christians, Jesus Christ is a concrete manifestation of God and hence points to himself as the revelation of God to humanity. This side of the Christian story must not be missed when engaging in Christian-Muslim dialogue.

In his book *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*, Tarif Khalidi (a Palestinian historian and professor of Arabic and Islamic studies) researched into the Muslim Jesus, compiling stories and sayings associated with him in Islamic tradition which he designated as the “Muslim gospel”.¹⁸ In his own view, “the totality of this Gospel is the story of a love affair between Islam and Jesus...a unique record of how one world religion chose to adopt the central figure of another, coming to recognize him as constitutive of its own identity”.¹⁹ In this “Muslim Gospel”, Khalidi further asserts that the wealth of tradition found in Islamic literature about Jesus indicates a deep religious and theological reality that Islam and Christianity have in complementarity. However, the big question here is: will Muslims accept Khalidi’s claim that Jesus is a central figure in Christianity whom they have adopted? In Islamic faith consciousness, Jesus is part of the

¹⁶ Hasan Askari. “The Dialogical Relationship between Christianity and Islam.” 1972, p483

¹⁷ Ibid, p486. See also OddjØrn Leirvik. *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*. 2010,p12

¹⁸ Tarif Khalidi. *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and stories in Islamic Literature*. 2001, p3)

¹⁹ Tarif Khalidi. *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and stories in Islamic Literature*. 2001, p5-6

line of prophecy. To see him as an adopted prophet might pose some challenges to dialogue.

Mahmoud Ayoub's contribution to the Christological discourse cannot be overlooked. According to Ayoub, earlier research on the subject of Jesus in Islam has been comparative and usually judgemental, the yardstick being the New Testament account of the life, teaching and significance of Jesus, the Christ. "Useful as this research may have been for the wealth of information it had uncovered on Christian-Muslim relations, it had often harboured old prejudices and fostered new hostilities".²⁰ For Ayoub, enough work has been done on the comparative study of Jesus in Islam in response to questions of similarities and differences. "It is [now] time for both Christian and Muslim scholars to go beyond this cataloguing on points of difference and similarities and drawing on old conclusions".²¹ For Ayoub, "to go beyond" such comparative lines demands that the Islamic view of Jesus Christ is respected and accepted as authentic to the tradition of Islam. This is because, "no matter how different the Qur'anic and later Islamic view of Jesus may be, it is nonetheless the view which Muslims have to struggle with and understand and which Christians must take as Muslim views and accept as such".²²

From the above scholarly contributions, one can first of all assert that while much of the scholarly work on Christology in Christian-Muslim dialogue has been treated tangentially in the effort to explore the wider perspectives of the world religions and the possibilities of dialogue among them, some scholars who even focus on Christology proper tend to undermine the Islamic view or more so, jettison the Christian belief in Jesus Christ (Reductionist Christologies) for the purpose of dialogue (Tariq Khalidi or Kung 1993). Secondly, other scholarly approaches to Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology focus either on the Christian presentation of Christ to Muslims (Beaumont 2005) or the Muslim views about Jesus and Christianity (Ayoub 1976 & 2007). As it were, most of these works fail to provide an equal platform where each tradition narrates its own story about the life and mission of Jesus Christ and how these narratives could lead to the promotion of common values.

²⁰ Mahmoud Ayoub. "Towards an Islamic Christology." 1976, p165

²¹ Ibid, p165

²² Mahmoud Ayoub. "Towards An Islamic Christology." 1976, p165-166

In consequence, this study intends to make a contribution to Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology as an exercise in learning where interlocutors share and learn from each other on their respective narratives about the life and mission of Jesus Christ. This form of dialogue is kick started by the interlocutors' interest in dialogue. With a "good-will-to-dialogue" as the starting point, if one desires to learn from the other concerning their narratives about the life and mission of Jesus as it pertains to their tradition, one must first of all be open to listen to these stories. On the part of the other too, if they are to be able to authentically communicate these narratives, they must know and be committed to these narratives. In this way, we shall argue that *commitment* and *openness* are necessary conditions for dialogue as an exercise in learning.

Furthermore, we understand that learning has a transformational dimension to it because in learning, the learners acquire something new which they previously did not know. Hence, if Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology is structured on dialogue as an exercise in learning, then the question is: what can Christians and Muslims learn from each other's narratives about Jesus Christ? In other words, what values does the Qur'anic Jesus (the prophet of Allah) inspire within Islam as a religion, and what might Christians learn from these values? What values does Jesus Christ (the Son of God) inspire in Christianity and what might Muslims learn from these values? Do these values provide or point to common contexts for Christian-Muslim dialogues of life and dialogues of common action? These are the questions that will occupy our attention in this exercise.

However, for dialogues of this nature to succeed, they need to be constructed within the context of a theological approach with a hermeneutic framework which support learning between diverse traditions. Christianity and Islam have different belief-systems whose meanings can only be measured by their internal coherence. Hence, one system cannot be used as a standard of measurement for the truthfulness of another. This is why dialogue between them on Christology must be structured on learning from the belief-systems of the other. Thus, we shall argue that "comparative theology" is that theological approach which supports this form of learning. Understood as the correlation of theological themes, concepts and methods between different religious traditions for the purpose of understanding and learning, comparative theology also emphasizes commitment to the

home tradition, openness to learn from the other and respect for the issues undergoing comparison.

In this way, not only does comparative theology support the claims on dialogue as an exercise in learning, its approach to dialogue also suggests the kind of hermeneutic framework which supports its work of comparison. Here, we shall propose Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self as that which supports this theological task. Our particular attention will be drawn to Ricoeur's notions of "*attestation*" and "narrative identity". Ricoeur defines *attestation* as the assurance of being oneself acting and suffering or the assurance of existing in the mode of selfhood. To the question: "what knowledge does the self have about itself?" *attestation* responds to this question by affirming that the self is the being that is certain that it is both an agent and a patient. Knowing very well the contentious nature of Christology between Christianity and Islam, we shall argue that when Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology is structured on *attestation* as the mutual sharing of testimonies about the identity and mission of Jesus Christ, it may hold prospect for positive and constructive dialogues.

On the question of "narrative identity", Ricoeur proposes two modes of identity: *Idem* identity and *ipse* identity. While *idem* identity constitutes the mode of personal identity that defines "sameness" or the permanent features of one's identity (sedimentation), *ipse* identity defines the self-constancy needed in keeping one's promise (innovation). However, it is *narrative identity* which holds these two modes of identity together in the person. Understood in a religious sense, *narrative identity* constitutes the dialectic interaction between one's belief-systems and the promise to remain faithful to them. Ricoeur then affirms that in narrating the story of our lives (narrative identity), we realise that others contribute to our narratives and we theirs i.e. we are subjects in others' stories and others are subjects in ours. For instance, we are our parents' child, our partner's partner, our friends' friend – and they are characters in our narratives.²³

On the basis of this interconnectedness between the self and the other through narrativity, we shall argue that Christology is both a *bridge* and *barrier* to Christian-

²³ Paul Ricoeur. "Pastoral Praxeology, Hermeneutics, and Identity" in *Figuring The Sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination*. 1995, p310

Muslim relations: a *bridge* because Christianity and Islam share some common themes about life and mission of Jesus Christ such as: *the virginal conception, the miraculous powers of Jesus, the Ascension and Second Coming*; a barrier because Jesus is understood as a “prophet of Allah” in Islam but as the “Son of God” in Christianity. Thus, the question is: what could Christians learn from the Muslim prophet, and what might Muslims learn from the Christian son of God? A dialogue of this nature needs to be guided by what we call “appropriate dialogical attitudes” (i.e. commitment, openness, respect for the other and the principle of equality). Here, Ricoeur’s work on the ethical and moral implications of narrative identity would serve as the context for reflecting on these dialogical attitudes.

What could be the motivations for relying on Paul Ricoeur as our competent guide? Paul Ricoeur is a philosopher of mediation who never gives up on the space-between. As a consequence, his hermeneutic philosophy takes on a “tensive” style which pays attention to the tensions which occur in human experiences and encounters. To mediate these tensions, he weaves together heterogeneous discourses to form composite ones in which new meanings are formed without diminishing their specificity and difference.²⁴ Thus, the terms maintain their differences at the same time as a “common ground” is formed: teasing out a unity of continuity in discontinuity and similarity in difference.²⁵

From this hermeneutic methodology, we shall assert that both Islam and Christianity possess symmetrical and dissymmetrical narrative discourses on Christology to which every dialogical enterprise must be attentive. As Marianne Moyaert puts it, in the context of religious pluralism Ricoeur would ask: “how can we bring people who belong to different religious traditions together? How can we overcome the threat of incommunicability?”²⁶

Though Ricoeur was sensitive to issues of interreligious violence, religious diversity and the encounter between the religious, he never really engaged in a systematic debate on these issues. So, by recourse to his hermeneutics, the purpose is to see how

²⁴ See Kim Atkins. “Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005).” <http://www.iep.utm.edu/ricoeur/> (17/04/2015)

²⁵ Kim Atkins. “Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005).” <http://www.iep.utm.edu/ricoeur/> (17/04/2015)

²⁶ Marianne Moyaert. “Absorption or Hospitality.” 2010, p75

Ricoeur's work provides the context for systematic reflections on the challenges presented by the encounter between people from diverse religious backgrounds like Christianity and Islam. We acknowledged that Ricoeur is a Christian philosopher whose works on theology are well known, but his philosophical writings here do not rely so much on his theological concepts, but rather focus on the human person and understanding the human situation. This explains why his works on *The Rule of Metaphor*, *From Text to Action*, *Oneself As Another* and the three volumes of *Time and Narrative* are appreciated by Christians and non-Christians alike. In this way, by taking Ricoeur as our competent guide, it is hoped that Christians and Muslims would find themselves at home with his unique style.

1.2. The Statement of the Problem

Douglas Pratt cites Charles Kimball as asking the questions: why do Christianity and Islam often clash so vigorously through the centuries? What informs the mistrust that pervades the history of Christian-Muslim relations and skews attempts to relate more constructively today?²⁷ For Pratt, the reason for this phenomenon is partly because "Islam and Christianity are pre-eminently religions of belief. Each has struggled to define its own orthodoxy against variant heterodoxies and heresies from within and each has a history of self proclamation as universal truth against any other claimant of truth from without".²⁸

Thus, Christology represents one of such theologico-doctrinal problematics between Christianity and Islam. This stems from the fact that Christianity professes Jesus Christ as the "Son of God" and saviour of the world. As Walter Kasper puts it, "the assertion that 'Jesus is 'the Christ' is the basic statement of Christian belief and Christology is no more than the conscientious elucidation of that proposition".²⁹ Against this Christological understanding is the Islamic view of Jesus as a "prophet or messenger of Allah" without divine attributions. As Muhammad Ata ur-Rahim puts it, "Jesus was a prophet who had been sent to the people of this earth; that he was a messenger whose guidance and teaching were a reaffirmation and extension of the guidance which the prophets before him had brought and were a preparation for the guidance which the

²⁷ Pratt, Douglas. *The Challenge of Islam*. 2005, p102

²⁸ Ibid, p102

²⁹ Walter Kasper. *Jesus The Christ*. 1976, p15-16

prophet coming after him would bring”.³⁰ This Islamic depiction of Jesus is bereft of divine attributes.

As a consequence, the above context presents the challenges of “claim and counter” in Christian-Muslim dialogical relations on Christology. How to properly approach this problematic to allow fruitful and beneficial dialogues between Christians and Muslims on Christology is our point of concerns – a task which many scholars have continued to wrestle. Since both religions have struggled to define their orthodoxy against variant heterodoxies and heresies and view themselves as the sole possessors of exclusive truths about Jesus against other claimants to the contrary, how can one engage these traditions in effective, constructive and beneficial dialogues on Christology? This is the task we shall face head on in this study.

1.3. The Purpose of The Study

When one critically examines the creedal elements of Christianity and Islam – especially those that relate to Jesus Christ, one discovers that both communities of faith share certain theological affirmations and beliefs. For instance, doctrinally Islam and Christianity are monotheistic religions – believing in the one true God, but understanding Him differently (e.g. the *Tawhid* versus the *Holy Trinity*). The Qur’an and the Synoptic Gospels also appear to reflect common christological themes such as *the Immaculate Conception* (Surah 3:35-41), *the Virginal Conception of Jesus* (Surah 19:16-21), *the miraculous powers of Jesus Christ* (Surah 5:109-110), *the Ascension* (Surah 4:157-158) and *the Second Coming* (Surah 43:57-67). Despite the fact that the Qur’an denies any attempt to give divine interpretations to these realities, it could be said that Islam and Christianity seem to have something more to say about Jesus Christ than any other world religion in the world.

Consequently, the purpose of the thesis is to draw an interreligious hermeneutic framework of dialogue that would constructively engage the two faith communities in dialogue as an exercise in learning. While mutual learning is the motivation for engaging in this form of dialogue, its primary goal is how dialogue as learning from and about the other might lead to the discernment and promotion of common values inspired by Jesus Christ. As we

³⁰ Muhammad Ata ur-Rahim. *Jesus Prophet of Islam*. 1999, p206

indicated earlier, the questions which will be of prime concern here are: what values does the Qur'anic Jesus (the prophet of Allah) inspire within Islam as a religion and what might Christians learn from these values? What values does Jesus Christ (the Son of God) inspire in Christianity and what might Muslims learn from these values?

1.4. The Research Questions

The thesis focuses on Christology in Christian-Muslim dialogue. It acknowledges that Christology is a theological problematic for Christian-Muslim engagements in the past and present. It asserts that a carefully constructed approach to dialogue can turn Christology from being a contentious dialogical subject to being a subject for genuine Christian-Muslim eirenic relations. Thus, it will be guided by the following research questions:

- 1.4.1. What theological and hermeneutic approach to dialogue is appropriate for constructive Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology as an exercise in learning?
- 1.4.2. How can this form of dialogue on Christology lead to the discovery and promotion of common values inspired by Jesus Christ?

1.5. The Organization of the Study

The thesis focuses on Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology as an exercise in learning. It relies on comparative theology as its approach to dialogue as an exercise in learning. Here, not only does comparative theology involve crossing over to another's tradition to learn its concepts, doctrines, beliefs and practices, but it also encourages the commitment of oneself to the home tradition. Hence, through this form of comparative theological exercise, we hope to achieve three goals of dialogue: knowing oneself better, knowing the other more authentically and living with the other more creatively.

To achieve the above end, the thesis is designed on the framework with two major parts. Part one focuses on the introduction to the thesis, its comparative theological approach and hermeneutic methodology. Part two addresses the Tradition-Specific understandings of Christology in Christianity and in Islam which serves as the basis for

undertaking comparative theological exercises on some similar Christological themes and concepts in Islam and Christianity. The purpose is to understand them in their original religious contexts. Since dialogue here is intended as an exercise in learning, the question then would be: what can Christians and Muslims learn from each other in this work of comparison? The response to this question sets the context for the teasing out of common values for Christian-Muslim dialogues of life and of common action.

In this way, the thesis begins with chapter one as an introduction which addresses issues relating to the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the organizational structure and delimitation of the thesis. Chapter two reviews and dismisses the traditional paradigms of dialogue as inadequate because of their lack of attention to the alterity of the other. It then presents the case of comparative theology as capable of traversing the pitfalls of the traditional models of dialogue. The Chapter proceeds from there to address the hermeneutic understructure of comparative theology by recourse to the Ricoeurian hermeneutics of the self. Here, we shall argue that the intersubjective dimension of narrative identity re-engages the self and the other in contexts where they are considered irreconcilably divided.

Chapter three shall focus on the ethical and moral implications of narrative identity for dialogue as an exercise in learning. Here, Ricoeur's "little ethics" provides the framework for critical reflections on the challenges of interreligious dialogue such as *commitment, openness, respect for the other and equality*. We shall argue that for Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology as an exercise in learning to succeed, it must begin from their tradition-specific understandings of the life and mission of Jesus Christ. It is from these tradition-specific perspectives of Christology that learning can take place. Hence, chapter four shall address these traditions-specific perspectives.

It is noted that Christology in Christianity covers a vast array of theological issues which cannot be contained in a rather limited space in this section. Thus, the temptation may be to attempt a summary. But such summaries may turn out to do less justice to this all-important theological subject at the heart of Christian faith and theology. Aware of this difficulty, dialogue on Christology as an exercise in learning still demands that Christians

share their story about the life and mission of Jesus Christ to their Muslim partners, despite the enormity of the subject concerned.

Thus, for the Christian-Tradition-specific perspective on Christology, we shall focus on the Christology of the NT Gospels, particularly on the story Mark tells about the life and mission of Jesus Christ in his Gospel. Our particular focus shall be a “theological interpretation”³¹ of Mark’s identification of Jesus Christ as the “Son of God” and the “Son of Man”. These reflections are intended to affirm the fact that the two-nature classical Christology of the Christian church represents the authentic Christian perspective on the identity of Jesus Christ. For Christian faith and theology, Jesus Christ is both God and man, one person, two natures, consubstantial with God the Father. It is this Christian commitment to Christology which must be brought to the dialogical table.

From the Islamic plane too, we shall argue for the case of an “Islamic Christology”. Thus, chapter four also justifies the view that though “Christology” seems to be heavily loaded with Christian theological overtones; there are justifiable grounds on which “Islamic Christology” is established. This is because the Qur’an, the Hadiths and *Tafsir* literature contain narratives that concern the events leading to and about the birth, the mission and final end of Jesus, the *Messiah* and Son of Mary. Hence, an “Islamic Christology” will concern itself with discourses that relate to the mission and final end of Jesus the prophet of Allah.

Having understood the Christian and Islamic perspectives on Christology and the Traditions that inspire these different perspectives, chapter five then focuses on comparing some Christological titles and themes in Islam and in Christianity. Some of these christological themes and titles include: *Messiah*, *Word of/from God*, *Spirit of/from God*, *Son of God*, *the Trinity*, *the Death and Resurrection*, *the Virginal Conception*, *the Ascension and Second Coming* of Jesus among others. Through these critical correlations, we shall demonstrate how Christology is both *bridge* and *barrier* to Christian-Muslim

³¹ By “theological interpretations”, we mean an “interpretation informed by a theological description of the nature of the scriptural writings and their reception, setting them in the scope of the saving divine Word through time.” In other words, it is a mode of scriptural reading whose goal is to reach a better understanding of God through theological categories. (See John Webster(editor). *International Journal of Theology*, vol.12 no.2 (2010), p116)

relations. We shall also demonstrate how the critical correlations of these themes and titles disclose the varying significant place Jesus occupies in each tradition.

Chapter six will then focus on rendering further reflections on the above context of “Jesus-significance” in Islam and in Christianity and how these might suggest certain values within each tradition. It is this context of *Jesus-significance* which paves the way for the teasing out of common values such as “interreligious prayer and Submission to God”, “peace and peaceful co-existence” and “Solidarity with the Poor and Marginalized”. These will be proposed as the context for Christian-Muslim dialogues of life and of common action.

Finally, chapter seven is the conclusion to the thesis. Here, it provides a bird’s eye-view of the Christological issues anticipated and fulfilled from the start of the dialogical journey. It also evaluates the work and recommends areas for further study. It must be stated here that the entire framework of the thesis is viewed as a “dialogical journey” – a journey that is not embarked upon for its own sake, but in response to God who invites both Muslims and Christians to commitment to His will. Thus, this “dialogical journey” is characterized by a Christian-Muslim conversation on how each understands Jesus Christ and how this understanding facilitates their fundamental call to be submitted to the will of God and to promote human flourishing.

1.6. The Delimitation of the Study

The thesis specifically focuses on Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology as an exercise in learning because of the apparent contentions between them on the subject. Though there are other alternative approaches to Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology such as Mark Beaumont’s presentation of Christ to Muslims or Ayoub’s Image of Jesus in Early Shi’i Muslim Literature, we choose to engage the literature from the perspective of dialogue as an exercise in learning. For us, if dialogue is to be geared towards mutual understanding and enrichment, then it has to be viewed as an exercise in learning from and about the other.

As we indicated earlier on, Christology covers a wide range of theological issues in Christian theology. On the one hand, one finds oneself in an impossible task in the attempt

to comprehensively address the theological issues (Soteriology and Eschatology) which have direct bearings to the identity and mission of Jesus Christ in this limited space. Thus, to present a Christian tradition-specific perspective on Christology which is succinct and orthodox, we propose a theological reading of the Christology of the New Testament (NT) Gospels – particularly the Gospel of Mark. While Markan Christology is no less limited, the hope is that a focus on how Mark uses the “Son of God” and “Son of Man” motif to tell his story about the life and mission of Jesus Christ might present an authentic Christian story about Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, the numerous literatures on Christian Christology gives the impression that the concept *Christology* is only characteristic of Christian theology i.e. the understanding that only Christian theology can provide the appropriate articulation of the identity and mission of Jesus Christ. Christology may cover a central place in Christian faith and theology, but it also finds a unique place in Islam when understood as “the study of the identity and mission of Jesus Christ”. In this way, our use of the concept “Islamic or Qur’anic Christology” is intended to capture the story Islam has to share about the identity and mission of Jesus Christ within its own religious context.

We must however not fail to indicate that we undertake these investigations as Christians, and specifically Roman Catholic Christians. Though one may find traces of our allegiance to the Roman Catholic faith in the work, especially when it comes to presenting the Christian perspectives on Christology, this could be viewed as underscoring the kind of commitment that is necessary for the work of comparative theology and dialogue as an exercise in learning. We do this with “the conviction that it is perfectly possible for persons of faith to maintain their own integrity while learning how to relate responsibly and sensitively to each other”.³²

³² Michael Barnes. *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*. 2002, p3-4

CHAPTER TWO

2. THE HERMENEUTICS OF COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY AND DIALOGUE AS AN EXERCISE IN LEARNING

2.1. The Introduction

According to Raymond Brown, “Christology” basically concerns the evaluation of Jesus in respect of who he was and the role he played in the divine plan of God.³³ While Christian theology construes Jesus Christ as the “Son of God” and “Saviour of the world”, Islamic theology conceives him as a “prophet of Allah”. These divergent ways of conceptualizing the identity and mission of Jesus Christ presents Christology as a theological challenge which has continued to vex Christian-Muslim relations at the theological and practical levels. For instance, whereas Christian theology views the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as essentially part of Christology, Islam dismisses these claims leaving Christians with an image of Jesus that is far removed from the New Testament presentation of him. The result is a history of “claim and counterclaim” in Christian-Muslim relations leading to the mutual dismissal of the other’s viewpoints.

In the light of the above contentions the question one would ask is whether Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology is possible. While some scholars assert that dialogue on the person of Jesus is impossible,³⁴ we shall argue that Christology holds greater prospects for positive and constructive Christian-Muslim dialogue through the understanding of dialogue as an exercise in learning. Understood within the context of comparative theology, we shall argue that dialogue as “an exercise in learning from and about the other” needs to be guided by what Ricoeur calls *attestation* – a kind of sharing of mutual testimonies concerning one’s tradition-specific understanding of the identity and mission of Jesus Christ. Here, this mode of sharing is defined by the interest to listen to, to learn from and understand the other’s viewpoint about Jesus Christ. In this way, dialogue as an exercise in learning offers a unique kind of encounter which is far removed from the argumentations and confrontations that often characterize the traditional models of dialogue.

³³ Raymond E. Brown. *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*. 1994, p3

³⁴ Paul Knitter. *Jesus and the Other Names*. 1996, p69

It must be said that the motivation for approaching Christian-Muslim dialogue from this perspective is informed by the growing dissatisfaction in the three traditional paradigms of dialogue (exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism), especially in respect of their inadequacies in preserving the integrity of the identity of the religious other. Today, there is a growing awareness and acceptance of the reality of religious plurality and the context of otherness, stimulated by the repeated calls for the preservation of the identity and integrity of both the self and other in dialogue. As we shall see, the three traditional paradigms seem to fall short in this respect. Thus, the lack of adequate paradigms has prompted the need for new approaches which engage the religions in dialogue which respect and preserve the integrity of the other.

It is in response to the above dialogical need that we turn to comparative theology as the appropriate theological context for approaching Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology as an exercise in learning and to Ricoeur's hermeneutics on narrative identity as providing the appropriate hermeneutic framework for reflecting on the challenges presented by dialogue among the religions. Our interest in the hermeneutics of Ricoeur is informed by the fact that Ricoeur is a philosopher of mediation who never gives up on the "space-between", but constantly seeks to negotiate or explore this space to allow some degree of interrelationship. For instance, when one considers the conflict between the philosophies of the exalted cogito and its demolition, whereas Descartes asserted that the self is the ultimate source of truth (the exalted cogito); Nietzsche countered this with the claim that knowledge of the self is an illusion (the shattered cogito). In mediating this tension Ricoeur presents *attestation* (a wounded cogito) as a new form of certainty different from Descartes' exalted cogito and Nietzsche's demolition of it. *Attestation* lies in equidistance between the exalted cogito and its demolition; a cogito capable of self belief.

By negotiating the tension between the "exalted cogito" and the "shattered cogito", Ricoeur does not only examines this space but tries to see the relationship which this space supports.³⁵ We consider this hermeneutic confidence essential for fostering new kinds of relationships between Christians and Muslims through dialogue as an exercise in learning. Marianne Moyaert affirms that when confronted by the problem of religious plurality,

³⁵ Michael Barnes. *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*. 2002, p22

Ricoeur's questions would be: "how can we bring people who belong to different religious traditions together? How can we tear down some of the walls between different 'language' communities? How can we overcome the threat of incommensurability?"³⁶

Thus, it could be said that with the standoffs in Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology, we hope to follow Ricoeur's lead in exploring the question: how can we explore Christology as a context of learning in Christian-Muslim relations? It must however be said here that though Ricoeur was sensitive to issues of religious diversity and interreligious violence, he did not engage in a systematic debate on these issues. Consequently, his hermeneutic inputs here are not intended as providing direct answers to the problem of interreligious dialogue. They only provide the appropriate context for thorough reflections on the challenges of interreligious dialogue.

Our focus here shall therefore be on Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self as we find it in *Oneself As Another*³⁷ and many of his other works which support the claims we make here. In *Oneself As Another*, Ricoeur divides personal identity into *idem*, *ipse* and narrative identities. While *idem*-identity expresses an aspect of personal identity which emphasizes sameness, unchangeability and sedimentation, *ipse*-identity expresses a different aspect of personal identity that is concomitant with the self-maintenance attained through promise-keeping. These two aspects of personal identity are held together in dialectic unity in the same person through narrative identity.

Ricoeur demonstrates that whereas *idem* and *ipse* identities constitute the identity of the self, narrative identity shows that there is no solipsistic self. Our identities are different, yet interconnected in some sense. In other words, our narratives are essentially interwoven with others' narratives such that we discover that in narrating the stories of our lives; we find that we are characters in other's narratives.³⁸ So, through our encounter with others, we facilitate the articulation of their narratives and they ours. This intersubjective character of narrative identity would serve as the common ground for engaging the other in dialogue. Here, the argument shall be that when Christians and Muslims engage in

³⁶ Marianne Moyaert. "Absorption or Hospitality." 2010, p75

³⁷ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992

³⁸ Paul Ricoeur. "Pastoral Praxeology, Hermeneutics, and Identity" in *Figuring the Sacred*. 1995, p310

dialogue on Christology as an exercise in learning, it could be the greatest point of disclosure to a world of knowledge which may contribute to positively transforming their interrelationships.

As we shall see, comparative theology focuses on correlating the theological themes, doctrines, concepts and practice between two religious traditions in order to learn, understand and be enriched by them. Thus, Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self facilitates the task of comparative theology in his ability to mediate the yawning gap between the self and the other to allow some degree of interrelationship. In this way, Ricoeur's "mediated space-between" conceptually sets the context for the possibility of dialogue between people of different religious traditions who do not necessarily share the same theological and religious viewpoints on a particular subject.

Comparative theology also involves the crossing-over to another's tradition to learn and understand texts, doctrines and practice. These forms of crossings raise questions regarding the epistemology validity and the ethical allowability for such crossings (i.e. intratextual problems). Here, while acknowledging the problem of *intratextuality*, Ricoeur nonetheless proposes *translation* as means of understanding texts due to linguistic barriers and cultural differences. Thus, we shall argue here that while religious texts cannot be fully understood by believers from other traditions, translation nonetheless reduces their degree of incomprehensibility. This is effectively done through dialogue as an exercise in learning.

2.2. Understanding the Meaning of Interreligious Dialogue

In the face of religious diversity and ideological conflicts among the religions today, many have proposed the need for more interreligious dialogues and cooperation among the religions. This necessity for dialogue today is aptly captured by Hans Kung's famous statement: there will be "no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions. No dialogue between the religions without investigations of the foundations of the religions".³⁹ Not

³⁹ Hans Kung. *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*. 1991, p171 & *Islam: Past, Present & Future*. 2007, xxiii

only does dialogue provide the space for the various religions to converse together and to get to know one another in an atmosphere of openness and mutual sharing but it also has the potential to ameliorate the tensions that exist among the religions. To achieve these laudable goals, there is the growing need for clarity on what interreligious dialogue is all about, its concerns and goals and the processes it needs to take to achieve these goals.

Thus, the discourse below is a brief consideration of the views of some scholars on the definition and goals of interreligious dialogue. The interest here is to find the appropriate gateway into the hermeneutic issues that characterise the concept and to clearly define the form and goal of dialogue we propose for Christian-Muslim conversations on Christology. It must be stated rather prematurely here that for interreligious dialogue to be successful, it must be characterised by one's commitment to the home tradition and respect for the religious other as an equal partner. However, before this assertion can be substantiated, let us briefly consider some of the definitions of interreligious dialogue as proposed by some scholars.

John V. Taylor⁴⁰ defined interreligious dialogue as the “sustained conversation between parties who are not saying the same thing and who recognize and respect contradictions and mutual exclusions between their various ways of thinking”.⁴¹ For Taylor, the object of this form of dialogue “is understanding and appreciation, leading to further reflection upon the implication for one's own position on the convictions and sensitivities of the other traditions”.⁴² Taylor's view that the goal of this “sustained conversation” is “understanding and appreciation” of the views of the religious other which lead to further reflection on one's own religious views is very significant for interreligious learning. If interreligious dialogue leads the dialogical partners to the appreciation of each other's religious traditions, then we could say that dialogue is all the more worth pursuing.

For Jason Barker, interreligious dialogue is “a formal process in which authoritative members of at least two religious communities come together for an extended

⁴⁰ The Right Reverend Dr John V. Taylor is a theologian and Bishop of Winchester, England.

⁴¹ John V. Taylor. “The Theological Basis of Interfaith Dialogue” in the *International Review of Mission* (vol. 68: 373–384). 1979, p373

⁴² Ibid, p373

and serious discussion of the beliefs and practices that separate the communities”.⁴³ Though we know that dialogue is both formal and informal, Barker’s definition seems to limit dialogue to its formal aspect which only engages scholars and religious authorities. However, dialogue equally takes place among grassroots and can be informal. So it has both a formal and informal dimension.

For Leonard Swidler, interreligious dialogue is “a conversation between two or more persons with differing views, the primary purpose of which is for the participants to learn from each other so that both can change and grow”.⁴⁴ For Swidler, “the very fact that I learn that my dialogue partner believes ‘this’ rather than ‘that’ changes my attitude toward that person; and a change in my attitude is a significant change and growth in me”.⁴⁵ In other words, we enter into dialogue with the other so that we can learn, change and grow and not so that we can force change on the other. Here, one can say that Swidler’s attention to the goal of dialogue as “learning, changing and growing” is a significant contribution to the understanding of interreligious dialogue.

On the question of the goals of dialogue, Swidler suggests three goals for interreligious dialogue: (1) “to know oneself ever more profoundly, (2) to know the other ever more authentically (3) to live ever more accordingly”.⁴⁶ Here, one finds that dialogue is oriented not just towards learning about but also towards learning from the other which leads to a better understanding of oneself. However, the success of this form of dialogue presupposes some degree of respect and openness to the other.

From the definitions above one finds some hermeneutic issues that speak to the heart of the interreligious dialogue project. These issues include the understanding of dialogue as: a conversation, a form of learning, directed towards mutual understanding and growth and enrichment. If we understand a conversation as a form of interaction between people or groups of people on a subject matter (whether formal or informal), then we could say that dialogical conversations need to be non-confrontational and non-debative. They also need to be inspired by what Gadamer calls “the good-will to dialogue” – the good-will

⁴³ Jason Barker. *Christians and Interreligious Dialogue*. The Watchman Expositor, Vol. 5 No. 4 1998, p7

⁴⁴ Leonard Swidler. *Towards a Universal Theology of Religions*. 1988, p6

⁴⁵ Leonard Swidler. *Towards a Universal Theology of Religions*. 1988, p6

⁴⁶ Ibid, p26

to learn from and about the other. As Gadamer observed, “it belongs to every true conversation that each opens up himself to the other, truly accepts his points of view as valid... What is to be grasped is the substantive rightness of his opinion, so that we can be at one with each other on a subject”.⁴⁷ This kind of conversation is what dialogue as an exercise in learning demands.

Having considered the above views on the subject, we therefore define interreligious dialogue as “the constructive and positive conversation between people of different religious traditions, on issues of religious significance, for the purpose of mutual learning and enrichment.” This definition reveals two key definitive concepts that will guide our discourse on dialogue. These are the process of dialogue as a “constructive and positive conversation” and the goal of dialogue as “mutual learning and enrichment”. While we conceive mutual learning and enrichment as the intended goals of dialogue proposed here, the process itself raises multifarious questions and challenges especially when it comes to understanding across different religious traditions like Christianity and Islam.

Catherine Cornille notes that these questions relate to: the im-possibility of crossing religious boundaries to learn and understand the meanings of particular teachings and practices in their original religious context, the allowance for such crossing and the dynamics and ethics that this entails.⁴⁸ As Panikkar also puts it; “to cross the boundaries of one’s culture without realizing that the other may have a radically different approach to reality is today no longer admissible. If still consciously done, it would be philosophically naïve, politically outrageous and religiously sinful”.⁴⁹ It is therefore in the light of the above concerns for the identity and integrity of the religious other that we share the opinion of scholars that the three traditional paradigms of dialogue lack the adequate response to the question of otherness. This inadequacy is not only evident in terms of their failure to understand and appreciate the other’s tradition but also, each in a way loses touch

⁴⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer. *Truth and Methods*. 1989, p385

⁴⁸ Cornille, C. & Conway, and C. *Interreligious Hermeneutics*. 2010, ix.

⁴⁹ Raimon Panikkar. *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*. 1979, p9

with the home tradition.⁵⁰ Let us undertake a succinct overview of these traditional paradigms of interreligious dialogue bringing out their respective inadequacies.

2.2.1. Exclusivism as a Paradigm of Dialogue

According to Pratt, religious exclusivism “amounts to the material identification of a particular religion with the essence and substance of true universal religion, thereby excluding all other possibilities to the claim”.⁵¹ Soteriologically, exclusivists hold that believers of other religions can only be saved when they convert to their religion. Whereas this evaluation of other religions is said to be very common with the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), its Christian context was more defined by the axiom *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (outside the Church, there is no salvation).⁵² Theologically, the basis of this axiom suggests that Jesus Christ is the only efficacious source of salvation and he established the Church (Roman Catholic) as the only means by which salvation is made possible for all.

While this exclusivist mentality was the case for the Catholic Church, especially from the third century onwards, perspectives changed along the paths that led to the Second Vatican Council in 1964. The Church took on an inclusivist position at this council where it admitted that there are some salvific elements in non-Christian religions (seeds of the word).⁵³ Though exclusivism is still very common with some evangelical Pentecostal churches, one also finds it in Islam and Judaism. In Judaism the interpretation of the concept of Israel as the “chosen people of God” eliminates all who do not accept Jewish monotheism.⁵⁴ In Islam, Christians are accused of wrongdoing because of their Trinitarian beliefs (Surah 4:171). Thus, there are still religions which hold the view that salvation is only made possible within the confines of their religious traditions.

⁵⁰ James L. Fredericks. *Faith Among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions*. 1999, p1-8

⁵¹ Douglas Pratt. *Faith to Faith: Issues in Interreligious Engagement*. 2008, p69-70

⁵² It is said that St Cyprian, bishop of Carthage who lived in the third century (205-258AD) is the originator of the axiom – “Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus”.

⁵³ *Nostra Aetate #2, and for Muslims, #3*

⁵⁴ Jeremiah 16: 20 and Micah 4:5 for elements of the concept of the “chosen people.”

However, could this level of exclusivism be the measure of the sort of commitment needed for interreligious dialogue? If commitment defines the quality of being dedicated to a cause, an activity or a *being*, does not religious commitment demand one's exclusive dedication to one's object of worship? While this might be the case, within the context of dialogue, the absence of openness to one's dialogical partner betrays the exclusivist position as inimical to dialogue. For the exclusivist, there is no need to dialogue with the religious other because there is nothing worthwhile to learn from them. Truth can only be found in the home tradition. So, whether in its open, closed or extreme forms,⁵⁵ exclusivism creates little room for dialogue with the other. The other can only be real when it becomes the self.

2.2.2. Inclusivism as a Paradigm of Dialogue

Inclusivism is structured on the claim that whereas one's religious beliefs are absolutely true, the other's beliefs are only partially true and find their fulfilment in one's beliefs. According to Pratt, inclusivism is "the effective identity of a particular religion as the universal, with some allowance made for others".⁵⁶ In contrast to exclusivism, inclusivism does not deny in advance the truth or soteriological value of other religions but claims that while one's religion is absolutely true, other religions are only true if they contain religious features common to one's religion.

In a particularly Christian context (Roman Catholic), inclusivism asserts that salvation is possible in other religions but these find their fulfilment in Christianity because Jesus Christ the head of the Church is the one and only universal saviour of the world. For instance, Karl Rahner's "Anonymous Christianity"⁵⁷ purports that God's salvific plan and universal self-communication, which was established in the covenant with Noah, was not just for some people but for all of humanity (Gen 9:16). For Rahner, God's salvific will is for all to be saved as the text of 1 Timothy 2:4 supports – God "wants all to be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth". It follows then that if Christ is the ultimate fulfilment of

⁵⁵ Pratt, Douglas. *Faith to Faith: Issues in Interreligious Engagement*. 2008, p69-72

⁵⁶ Pratt, Douglas. *Faith to Faith*. 2008, p72

⁵⁷ See Karl Rahner. *Theological Investigations* 1. 1961, p75-76

the salvific plan of God, then Christ came for all to save all.⁵⁸ In this way, salvation is not only limited to an explicit knowledge and profession of faith in Christ but includes all who live in the state of Christ's grace through faith, hope and love and yet have no explicit knowledge that their lives are oriented in grace-given salvation to Jesus Christ.⁵⁹

The Second Vatican Council also affirms this intrinsic element of the universal gift of the grace of Christ when it says: "those who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart and moved by grace, try in their actions to do His will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience – those too may attain eternal salvation".⁶⁰ However, in more explicit terms, Christian theological inclusivism reflects Walter Kasper's view that "the one God has once only, yet wholly, definitively and unreservedly communicated himself historically in Jesus Christ".⁶¹ If God communicated himself in this way, then it follows that "Christ is both *id quo maius cogitari nequit* (that than which nothing greater can be thought) and *id quo Deus maius operari nequit* (that than which God can do no greater).⁶² Consequently, Kasper affirmed that "everything true and good that the other religions contain is a participation in what appeared in its fullness in Jesus Christ".⁶³ In the light of the above contexts, Christian theology (from a more Catholic perspective) perceives the other religions as possessing "seeds of the word"⁶⁴ or the ray of that truth which enlightens all men.⁶⁵

Today, inclusivism seems to be popular among Christian scholars such as Kenneth Cragg, Hans Küng, Jacques Dupuis⁶⁶ and Mark Heim⁶⁷ among others. While many agree that inclusivism is more open to interreligious dialogue in contrast to exclusivism, it is nonetheless criticised in the way inclusivists restrict their openness to only what is

⁵⁸ Ibid, p391

⁵⁹ Ibid, p283

⁶⁰ "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church – *Lumen Gentium* #16 (Vatican Council II)

⁶¹ Walter Kasper. "The Uniqueness and Universality of Jesus Christ." 2004, p16

⁶² Ibid, p16

⁶³ Ibid, p16

⁶⁴ *Ad Gentes* #11, 15.

⁶⁵ *Nostra Aetate* #2.

⁶⁶ Jacques Dupuis. *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*. 2001

⁶⁷ Mark Heim. *Salvation, Truth and Difference in Religion*. 1995

common between the self and the other. In John Hick's view, inclusivism rests upon the claim that "non-christians can be saved because unknown to them Christ is secretly 'in a way' united with them".⁶⁸ Here, the affirmation of the unity and universality of the Christian dispensation of salvation is often viewed by some scholars as an imperialism that swallows up, co-opts or oppresses the religious other. However, as Panikkar cautioned, the other must be viewed as an equal source of self understanding and interpretation and their integrity must be respected in every dialogue.⁶⁹ Genuine and honest dialogue demands that while the non-negotiable elements of one's religious tradition are affirmed, the integrity of those of the other should also be respected.

2.2.3. Pluralism as a Paradigm of Dialogue

Unlike exclusivism and inclusivism, religious pluralism posits all religions as different expressions of one divine reality.⁷⁰ In other words, pluralism perceives all the religions as different streams leading to the same ocean. According to Marianne Moyaert, "pluralism considers religious traditions to be mere variations of the same common ground, variations of the same soteriological theme".⁷¹ Thus, its central significance is the purported equality it claims to offer to all the religions. As a proponent of this liberal pluralist view John Hick, for instance, views all religions as historically and culturally determined interpretations of the ineffable Real or partial expressions of the Ultimate Reality.⁷² As a consequence, Hick argues for a shift away from Christian Christocentrism to a theocentric approach to religion.⁷³ Put in his own words, Hick describes this shift as the "Copernican revolution" which necessitates a movement "away from the dogma that Christianity is at the centre, to the realization that it is God who is at the centre and all religions including our own serve and revolve around him".⁷⁴

⁶⁸ John Hick. *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion*. 1993, p84

⁶⁹ Raimon Panikkar. *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*. 1999, p30

⁷⁰ Douglas Pratt. *Faith to Faith: Issues in Interreligious Engagement*. 2008, p79

⁷¹ Marianne Moyaert. "Scriptural Reasoning as Interreligious Dialogue." 2013, p66

⁷² John Hick. *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Response to the Transcendent*. 1989, p235-36

⁷³ John Hick. *God and the Universe of Faith: Essays in the philosophy of religion*. 1988

⁷⁴ For Hick, if God wishes that everyone should be saved, then it is inconceivable that God will reveal himself in such a way that only a small part of humanity can be saved (See Hick, John. *God and the Universe of Faith*. 1922 and Hick in Alister McGrath. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. 1997, p537)

In his pluralist theocentric approach to the religions, Paul Knitter also considered that the Christian belief in the uniqueness of Christ as normative and constitutive for any true encounter with God is an obstacle and an unnecessary barrier that stands in the way of authentic dialogue. For him, Jesus most likely experienced himself as a prophet anointed specially by God's Spirit to complete the mission of the earlier prophets by announcing and ratifying the good news of the reign of God.⁷⁵ In his soteriocentric and correlational model of dialogue, Knitter reckons that the dialogical task today should not be centred on "right beliefs" in Christian uniqueness but "right practice" with other faith traditions in the promotion of the reign of God's saving mission. In this way, the uniqueness of Jesus should then be construed adverbially in correlation to other salvific mediators. In other words, Christians can affirm that "Jesus is truly divine and saviour but they no longer need to announce that he is solely divine and saviour"⁷⁶ because of the presence of other saviour figures.

When one considers the pluralists approach to dialogue, it appears to be conducive for dialogue in the way it offers equal opportunity to all the religions through its "common ground approach to the religions".⁷⁷ However, as Moyaert puts it: the pluralists' are "so eager to promote dialogue that they tend to forget the irreducible differences that exist between the religions".⁷⁸ For instance, it is doubtful whether committed believers for instance in Judaism or Islam will succumb to the relativizing understanding that their religion is a partial expression of the Ultimate Real. Thus, Gavin D'Costa affirms that the fundamental problem of pluralism lies in its "desire to flee from the particularity of any religious claim; be it Christian or non-Christian".⁷⁹

From the above analysis of the three paradigms, we could say that while exclusivism closes all doors to dialogue with the other, it is the self that determines the

⁷⁵ Knitter, Paul. *One Earth Many Religions*. 1996, p27

⁷⁶ Ibid, p35

⁷⁷ Here, while Gilkey (1987: 37) views all the religions as more or less equal contexts of salvation, and thus enjoy a "rough parity," Cobb (1990: 604) views them as sharing similar experiences which establish "common grounds in a deeper way."

⁷⁸ Marianne Moyaert. "On Vulnerability: Tracing the Ethical Dimension of Comparative Theology," in *Religions III*. (2012), p1148

⁷⁹ Gavin D'Costa. *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*. 2000, p28

degree of openness to the other in inclusivism. However, by declaring a limitless playfield of openness for all religions, pluralism only ends up caricaturing the real identities of both the self and the other. Hence, not only do these paradigms fail to adequately preserve the integrity of the identity of the other in the light of the specificity of their traditions, they also fail in respect of the self's commitment to the home tradition. As Michael Barnes asserted, while "exclusivism privileges one's tradition against all others; inclusivism patronises other traditions as less or partial versions of what is realized in only one; and pluralism argues for the relativizing of all others including one's own".⁸⁰ In Joseph DiNoia's view, these paradigms obscure basic issues posed by the current situations relating to religious engagements, especially on how to affirm the universality of the Christian dispensation without sacrificing its particularity.⁸¹

In the light of the apparent inadequacies of these traditional paradigms Anselm Min intimates that "we are living in a new kairos that demands a new paradigm of its own"⁸² and this paradigm demands a turn away from the threefold traditional paradigms of dialogue to models that engage the religions in meaningful and beneficial ways. It is in response to this need that we undertake this project of Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology as "an exercise in learning from and about the other". This form of dialogue, we shall argue, finds its theological reflections in what is today called comparative theology. The question however is: what is comparative theology? What is its attitude towards the other in dialogue and how does it serve the interest of dialogue as an exercise in learning?

2.3. The Case of Comparative Theology and Interreligious Learning

As a theological approach, comparative theology engages in the comparison of the theologies of different religions and reflects on their theological themes, methods and concepts as exemplified in their respective traditions, in order to learn and understand them and so be enriched by this learning. Comparative theology is a learning process as it asserts that a deeper interest and learning of the traditions of the religious other through shared

⁸⁰ Michael Barnes. *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*. 2002, p8

⁸¹ Joseph DiNoia. *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective*. 1992, p180.

⁸² Anselm K. Min. *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World*. 2004, p3

experience is necessary for an understanding of this other. It is therefore distinguished by its interests and attention to how theology is done in other traditions by exploring their theological theme through the practice of comparisons. While this may be the seminal feature of its task, the views of Ulrich Winkler, David Tracy, Francis Clooney and James Fredericks among others may help to clarify the defining characteristics of this form of theologizing.

For Ulrich Winkler, “comparative theology is not a new variation of an academic theological field with new materials from other religions but presupposes both theological reflection and religious experience – in one’s own and the other religious traditions, intellectual discourse and existential encounter”.⁸³ Comparative theology is not just the mere comparisons of religions and their theologies but involves critical reflections on and the experience of, these theologies.⁸⁴ In mapping out the parameters of the systematic description of comparative theology, Winkler asserts that comparative theology is, first of all a confessional theology and not a depreciatory apologetics. It is confessional because it “has its place in the sphere of creed and church even if the details of the relationship may be laden with tension”.⁸⁵ It is anti-apologetic because it is “against the self-aggrandizing and self-immunization of one’s own faith directed against the degradation of other religions through a hermeneutic of suspicion”.⁸⁶ In other words, comparative theology relates to other religions with benevolence, a willingness to learn from them and a critical appreciation of who they are.

Secondly, comparative theology is more about theology and not about Religious studies. According to Winkler, whereas religious studies chooses an outsider perspective for observing religions by describing and classifying them, comparative theology reflects from the insider perspective and advocates claiming validity for one’s own religious truth.⁸⁷ For Winkler, “religions are parameters of meaning that ask not just to be observed

⁸³ Ulrich Winkler. “What is Comparative Theology?” in Cheethah David et al (Editors). *Interreligious Hermeneutics in Pluralistic Europe: Between Text and People*. 2011, p234

⁸⁴ Ibid, p232

⁸⁵ Ibid, p241

⁸⁶ Ibid, p241

⁸⁷ Ulrich Winkler. “What is Comparative Theology?” 2011, p241-242, 242

and reflected upon but also to be existentially tried and experienced”,⁸⁸ and comparative theology tries to exactly do that. In consequence, Winkler concludes that while comparative theology is not the same as religious studies or the theology of religions, it is also not an alternative to these fields of study. It rather builds on these fields of study to achieve its end. Thus, whereas the theology of religions must be able “to argue the potential equality of religious traditions and the constitutivity of religious differences for the portrayal of one’s own religious faith, comparative theology ventures with this encouragement, into the concrete and detailed-oriented field of reflection and experience of the religions”.⁸⁹

Winkler’s idea that comparative theology is non-depreciatory apologetics but seeks positive relationship with other religions, offers an important contribution to our discourse on Christian-Muslim dialogue as an exercise in learning – for not only does it affirm the theologian’s commitment to his/her religious tradition, it also invites the theologian to learn and understand the religious traditions of the other. This dialectics of commitment and openness reflects the type of dialogical attitude we intend to propose for Christian-Muslim conversations on Christology.

For David Tracy, the term comparative theology was used in the past (the 19th century if not earlier) either in contrast to theoretic theology or to the study of religious doctrines. In its predominantly used Christian contexts, the concept by then conveyed the sense of what is known today as the theology of religions i.e. a “Christian reflection on the general idea of other religions in the light of some particular understanding of the Christian faith”⁹⁰ However, the fact that today theology is not just a Christian discipline but is situated within the multidisciplinary field of religious studies, impels contemporary theology in its varied traditions to become comparative theology.⁹¹ Though comparative theology “was not used in the pre-modern period, comparative elements based on reflections on other religions were present in the Christian tradition since its beginnings...

⁸⁸ Ibid, p242

⁸⁹ Ibid, p245

⁹⁰ Tracy, David. “Theology: Comparative Theology,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 16 vols. 14: 446 & Clooney Francis, X. “Comparative Theology: A Review of Recent Books,” in *Theological Studies* 56. 1995, p521).

⁹¹ Ibid, 446

These comparative elements can be traced in leanings both positive (in terms of borrowing) and negative (i.e. exclusivism or the tendencies to demonise the other)”.⁹²

According to Tracy, therefore, the reality of religious plurality today suggests that doing theology necessitates relying on theological methods that are general in character (religious studies) and on those that deal with comparative methods. In his exploration of the interplay between these two methods of theologizing, Tracy notes four major shared premises in comparative theology: “the reinterpretation of central religious symbols in a religiously pluralistic world, the construction of new foundations for traditions, the addressing of questions of religious pluralism on explicitly theological grounds, both the hermeneutics of suspicion and critique and the hermeneutics of retrieval”.⁹³

From these premises Tracy suggested two understandings of comparative theology: firstly “it refers to the comparisons of the doctrinal systems of two or more religious traditions”.⁹⁴ This aspect of comparative theology is non-theological and non-confessional but is part of the general academic study of religions. Secondly, it is a confessional discipline where one’s religious tradition is critically correlated with another religious tradition.⁹⁵ So we could say that between Tracy and Winkler, we can already infer that comparative theology is the critical correlation of two religious traditions with the view to deeply learn and understand them and hence be enriched by this learning. It is this understanding of comparative theology which supports the model of dialogue we propose here. Let us see how Francis Clooney and James Fredericks contribute to it.

According to Francis Clooney, comparative theology is not just a confessional theology or one which engages in the work of mere comparisons but it is a theology that is constructive. It is “constructive” because one “interprets the meaning and truth of one

⁹² See Bloomer’s “Comparative Theology, Comparative Religion, and Hindu-Christian Studies: Ethnography as Methods,” in the *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*. 2008, Vol.21, Article 10, p2- & David Tracy. “Theology: Comparative Theology,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 16 vols. 1987 14: 448)

⁹³ Francis Clooney. “Comparative Theology: A Review of Recent Books,” in *Theological Studies* 56. 1995, p522

⁹⁴ Francis Clooney. *The New Comparative Theology*. 2010, x

⁹⁵ Ibid, x

tradition by making a critical correlation with the classics of another religious tradition”.⁹⁶ It is also distinguished “by its sources and ways of proceeding, by its foundation in more than one tradition and by reflection which builds on that foundation rather than simply on themes or methods already articulated prior to the comparative practice”.⁹⁷ Thus, the comparison of theologies, the posing of theological questions in comparative ways and the doing of constructive theology from and after comparison constitute the meaning of comparative theology. In this way, Clooney sees comparative theology as “a manner of learning that takes seriously diversity and tradition, openness and truth, allowing neither to decide the meaning of our religious situation without recourse to the other”.⁹⁸

James Fredericks, who is an associate of Clooney, also points out four themes that are at the heart of comparative theology. First of all, comparative theology proceeds dialectically. Here, it is a critical study of another religious tradition either by means of reading their classic texts or by personal dialogue with practioners of the other religion or both. “The conversation with the other tradition eventually becomes a conversation with the home tradition in which its classic texts, art, rituals and ascetic practices are reinterpreted in the light of the study of the other tradition”.⁹⁹ Though this critical correlation can sometimes be positive or negative (relating to issues of similarities and differences), these two dialectics are very significant for the comparativist because they help to eradicate theories of religion which either marginalize difference (exclusivism and inclusivism) and reduce religions to “more of the same” (Pluralism) or those which privilege difference by contending that religions are incommensurable (Particularism).¹⁰⁰

Secondly, Fredericks observes that comparative theology emphasizes that thinking interreligiously is an intrinsic component of the theological enterprise and not a supplementary reflection that is consigned to an appendix of systematic theology.¹⁰¹ We note here that Tracy, earlier on, attested to this fact when he said that theology today is a multidisciplinary concept engaging all the religions i.e. in the face of religious diversity,

⁹⁶ Ibid, x-xi

⁹⁷ Francis Clooney. “Comparative Theology: A Review of Recent Books.”1995, p522

⁹⁸ Francis Clooney. *The New Comparative Theology*. 2010, p8

⁹⁹ Ibid, xi

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, xi

¹⁰¹ Ibid, xi

interreligious theologizing is no longer a secondary matter but a *sine qua non*. For Fredericks, therefore, “doing theology comparatively therefore means that the correlation of Christian doctrines and practices with those of other religions must be located at the centre of the Christian theological querens itself”.¹⁰² In other words, the inevitability of religious plurality today demands that religious people learn to think and behave in ways that preserve the integrity of the religious other without losing their own identities.

Thirdly, Fredericks indicates that the problem of interpretation raised by comparisons is not limited to soteriological questions as in the case of the study of religions. Instead, “comparative theology addresses every aspect of the home tradition’s doctrine and practices”.¹⁰³ Unlike some theologians who think that Christian-Muslim dialogue on the person of Jesus Christ (the doctrinal) remains contentious and should be avoided where possible,¹⁰⁴ Fredericks objects to this way of thinking by his assertion that doing theology comparatively is theology in the broadest sense of the word. In other words, it must be a theology that is intellectually rigorous in interpreting classic texts, doctrines and practices of the religions in their entirety.¹⁰⁵

Fourthly, James Fredericks asserts that comparative theology relies on limited experiments in the work of comparison. In other words, it relies on limited case studies. This is better explained by Clooney when he said that “the more specific a comparison, the better; the more particular a Christian effort to understand a non-Christian practice, the better; the more we attend to learning about particular things and ideas that were previously other to us, the better”.¹⁰⁶ So, instead of offering all-encompassing theological theories based on claims for or against universal religious experiences, Frederick suggests “limited case studies” in which specific elements of the home religion are interpreted in comparison to another tradition. This allows for in-depth learning and understanding of the specific area of the traditions undergoing comparison.

¹⁰² Francis Clooney. *The New Comparative Theology*. 2010, xi-xii

¹⁰³ Ibid, xii

¹⁰⁴ Dardess, G. & Krier Mich, M. *In the Spirit of St. Francis and the Sultan*. 2011, p47 & Paul Knitter. *Jesus and the Other Names*. 1996, p69

¹⁰⁵ Francis Clooney (ed.). *The New Comparative Theology*. 2010, xii

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, xi

From this brief literature review of the concept, we could say that the comparative theological journey appears to have many destinations in respect to the scholars concerned and the goals they seek to achieve. However, our interest is to start the journey as defined by the views of Winkler Ulrich, Francis Clooney and James Fredericks among others.¹⁰⁷ As James Fredericks briefly noted, “comparative theology as we have proposed it, entails the interpretation of the meaning and truths of one’s own faith by means of a critical investigation of other faiths”.¹⁰⁸

As an exercise in learning, not only does it emphasize a profound learning of one’s faith but it also stresses knowing the other’s faith more authentically and living together ever more creatively. In this way, comparative theology differs from comparative religious studies because whereas comparative religious studies holds up for itself the scholarly ideal of detached inquiry and seeks as its primary public – the academic community of scholars, comparative theology proceeds not from a religiously neutral starting point.¹⁰⁹ It is a faith seeking understanding – one undertaken by believers for the benefit of believers, even as it includes the academy of scholars as its public.¹¹⁰

From the brief evaluations of the three traditional paradigms of dialogue, one would notice that whereas exclusivism is viewed as inimical to dialogue, inclusivism too is criticised as a sort of subtle imperialism that swallows up and oppresses the religious other. Though pluralism is viewed as more open to the religious other than the other two paradigms, its homogenization of all the traditions as expressions of the same reality has equally provoked negative sentiments from postliberal theologians who argue for the tradition-specific understanding of the religions.¹¹¹ As Pratt asserted, “there is no

¹⁰⁷ See also Ward, Keith. *Religion and Revelation*. 1994; *Religion and Human nature*. 1998; *Religion and Community*. 2000; Panikkar, Raimon. *Intra-religious Dialogue*. 1999; Laksana, Bagus, A. “Comparative Theology: Between Identity and Alterity.” 2010

¹⁰⁸ Francis Clooney (ed.). *The New Comparative Theology*. 2010, ix

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, xiii

¹¹⁰ Francis Clooney (ed). *The New Comparative Theology*. 2010, xiii

¹¹¹ George Lindbeck. *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*. 1984

reasonable ground to assume a link across religions; their individual or particular identities militate against any such linkage”.¹¹²

Pratt’s view re-echoes the position of the postliberals who argue that religions are particular, untranslatable and incommensurable. According to Moyaert, due to the above reaction of postliberalism against pluralism, “the theological pendulum swings from the virtue of openness to the value of commitment”.¹¹³ Here, while liberal theology defends the logic of sameness which pushes religious identities “into procrustean bed of unrestricted homogeneity, postliberalism affirms the logic of difference that presents religions as ‘indissolubly distinct entities.’”¹¹⁴ Thus, between both approaches the religious other is perceived as a problem that needs to be resolved either by “retreating to the security of sameness (pluralism) or by distancing otherness (postliberalism)”.¹¹⁵

It is within this context that comparative theology asserts its significance – as it argues for the intersubjective understanding among religions. Whereas it admits, with the postliberals that the religious other cannot be homogenized into an overarching liberal pluralist scheme, it also emphasizes that the religious other should not be made so strange to the self for reasons of radical incommensurability. For comparative theology, the theology of religions needs to pay due attention to: (1) otherness – which concerns respecting the uniqueness of the traditions undergoing dialogue (2) living creatively with the other – which goes beyond tolerance to focus on the genuine wish to understand and learn from another’s life as a friend and to embrace the dynamics this life entails. As James Fredericks indicates, comparative theology looks upon the truths of other traditions as resources for understanding one’s own faith.¹¹⁶

The question, however, is: what hermeneutic understructure supports this comparative theological claim? In other words, what is the conceptual hermeneutic framework within which comparative theology operates and moves towards its application

¹¹² Douglas Pratt. “Contextual Paradigms for Interfaith Relations.” in *Current Dialogue* 42 (2003), p8

¹¹³ Marianne Moyaert. “On Vulnerability: Tracing the Ethical Dimension of Comparative Theology,” 2012, p1149

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 1149

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 1149

¹¹⁶ James Fredericks. *Faith Meet Faiths*. 1999, p139

and appropriation as a methodological and ethical resource in interreligious dialogue as an exercise in learning? It is in response to these questions that we find the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur on selfhood and otherness illuminating.¹¹⁷ As the basis for establishing intersubjectivity, Ricoeur states that selfhood implies otherness to such an extent that selfhood and otherness cannot be separated.¹¹⁸

Ricoeur substantiates the above claim through his hermeneutics on personal identity in *Oneself As Another*. Here, we shall argue that his effort to re-engage the self and other in contexts where they are considered divided sets the context for Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology as exercise in learning. Ricoeur's notion of *translation* will also provide the appropriate context for reflecting on the challenge of intratextuality in interreligious dialogue. Until then, let us see how Ricoeur sets the hermeneutic grounds from which comparative theology takes off as an exercise in learning from and about the other in Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology.

2.4. Ricoeur's Hermeneutics of the Self and Interreligious Dialogue

The hermeneutic issues we shall raise here are particularly Ricoeurean. Our discourse here is first guided by how Ricoeur presents the *attestation* of the self as a bridge between the self and the other. The interest here is not only to demonstrate how Ricoeur's notion of *attestation* creatively mediates the epistemological gap created by the impasse between Descartes' cogito and Nietzsche's demolition of it, but more so, to show how *attestation* serves to remove dialogue from an argumentative and confrontational context, by placing it in a context of mutual sharing through dialogue as an exercise in learning. In this way, we shall argue that when Christians and Muslims attest to their respective faith convictions about the identity and mission of Jesus Christ, such dialogues traverse the problem of parallel monologues.

Secondly, through *idem*, *ipse* and *narrative identities*, Ricoeur also demonstrates how our identities are formed and how others also contribute to the enrichment of our

¹¹⁷ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992; *Time and Narrative I*. 1984; *Time and Narrative III*. 1988; "Narrative Identity" in *Philosophy Today* 35:1 (1991), p73-81; *On Translation*. 2006.

¹¹⁸ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p3

identities and we theirs. For Ricoeur, literary narratives and life histories are not exclusive from each other because narratives are always part of us before they are exiled from life into writing and return to life along the multiple paths of appropriation.¹¹⁹ In narrating our history, we find that “whole sections of our lives are part of the life history of others – of my parents, my friends, my companions in work and in leisure”.¹²⁰

Hence, in narrating the story of one’s life, one finds that others are co-authors to one’s narrative identity and “learning to narrate oneself is also learning how to narrate oneself in other ways”.¹²¹ Situating these aspects of personal identity within the context of comparative theology and interreligious dialogue, we shall demonstrate how they apply to the identities of the Christian and the Muslim and how they set the context for the possibility of Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology.

2.4.1. *Attestation* as Mediation in the Crisis of the Cogito

Reflexivity “refers to the capacity to reflect on oneself, to take responsibility for oneself and to act upon oneself. These reflexive acts of the self are basic features of selfhood”.¹²² However, as we shall see, the concept of the self together with the possibilities and limits of reflexivity are highly contested in both philosophical and theological discourses. In other words, while the modern emphasis on reflexivity laid the foundations for “a self-transparent, self-grounding knowing subject who is also an autonomous lawgiver and sufficient moral agent”,¹²³ others think that this emphasis on reflexivity has severely distorted our understanding of human existence, deepening our egocentricity and nurturing the illusions of the self.

In *Oneself As Another*, whereas Ricoeur views Descartes, Kant and Husserl among others as espousing the philosophies of the exalted subject,¹²⁴ he presents Nietzsche as Descartes’ “privileged adversary” whose critique of the self shatters and humiliates the philosophies of the “exalted cogito”. In Ricoeur’s view, the aftermath of Nietzsche’s

¹¹⁹ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p163

¹²⁰ Ibid, p161

¹²¹ Paul Ricoeur. *The Course of Recognition*. 2005, p101

¹²² Brian Gregor. *A Philosophical anthropology of the Cross: The Cruciform Self*. 2013, p23

¹²³ Ibid, p23

¹²⁴ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p4

assault on the “exalted cogito” left it in a critical condition. For Ricoeur, the philosophies of the “exalted cogito” seem to overlook the distortions that may be inherent in self-interpretation. While being a reminder of the possibility of self-deception, Nietzsche’s “shattered cogito” only leads to the all-consuming abyss of suspicion. With this impasse, Ricoeur introduces *attestation* as a new form of the certainty of the self. The *attestation* of the self “is a matter of identifying oneself, of recognizing who one is and of taking responsibility for oneself”.¹²⁵

In the *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes constructs a hypothesis of an all-encompassing metaphysical doubt to indicate the disproportions within a particular area of certainty.¹²⁶ To dramatize the doubt he creates the hypothesis of the great deceiver or an evil genius as the one behind every conceivable thought in me. He then concludes that there must be a “cogito” for the evil genius to deceive. Hence, “if the cogito can arise out of this extreme condition of doubt, it is because someone is doing the doubting”.¹²⁷ This led to the philosophy of the Cartesian certainty – “cogito ergo sum” (the philosophies of the exalted cogito). It is this kind of philosophy that Kant and Husserl among others would later develop.

For instance, Husserl asserted that consciousness is determined by intentionality. To be conscious is to be conscious that I am a ‘true’ being – definitively decided or definitively decidable being. So, if I abstain from believing or accepting already established philosophical foundations and my experience of the world around me, “I do so now as the ego that philosophizes and exercises the aforesaid abstention”.¹²⁸ In a Kantian sense, Husserl also reckons that “all reality is pure phenomena”¹²⁹ – the only data from which we can begin. They appear in the mind in the form of unchanging and invariable types and essences.¹³⁰ Through epoché,¹³¹ intentional consciousness effects an eidetic intuition which makes objects present to the subject. Thus, epoché is “the radical and

¹²⁵ Brian Gregor. *A Philosophical Anthropology of the Cross*. 2013, p25

¹²⁶ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p5

¹²⁷ Ibid, p5

¹²⁸ Edmund Husserl. *Cartesian Meditations*. 1999, p19

¹²⁹ Ibid, p20

¹³⁰ Michael Barnes. *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*. 2002, p74

¹³¹ Edmund Husserl. *Cartesian Meditations*. 1999, p20-21

universal method by which I apprehend myself purely: as ego and with my own conscious life, in and by which the entire objective world exists for me and is precisely as it is for me”.¹³²

Consequently, Husserl asserted that this state of being reveals a transcendental ego whose intentional act is the source of objective knowledge of the world. In this way, “anything belonging to the world, any spatiotemporal being, exists for me – that is to say, is accepted by me – in that I experience it, perceive it, remember it, think of it somehow, judge about it, value it, desire it or the like”.¹³³ Thus, the other is for me absolutely nothing other than the way I conceive it to be in my conscious cogito. This emphasis on the cogito led to Michael Barnes’ assertion that the Husserlian egology implies that “the world is ordered round me as the centre. Temporally and spatially, I am at the centre with everything and everyone, near and far, dependent on me insofar as they appear to me”.¹³⁴ Here, the cogito is posited as the exclusive claimant of truth, a type of religious exclusivism. It is the self who gives meaning to the other without reference to the other’s self-understanding.

Opposed to this Husserlian egology is the Levinasian emphasis on the infinity and ethical transcendence of the other. For Levinas “infinity remains ever exterior to thought and overflows the thoughts that think it”.¹³⁵ The self’s relation with the other is a “relations without relation”. This is because, the other who is, first of all, not reducible to the same, remains unknowable, is outside the totality of the same and calls egology to question. Secondly, when the “I” encounters the other, the “I” is called back to the meaning of its freedom – a freedom which is founded by the other. Here, the genuine freedom of the “I” is based on its responsibility and obligation towards the other.¹³⁶ In other words, the ethical responsibility of the “I” is to guard the infinite other against any systematic determination of moral principles. These sets of *a priori* principles are considered as violations to the alterity of the other.

¹³² Ibid, p20-21

¹³³ Edmund Husserl. *Cartesian Meditations*. 1999, p20-21

¹³⁴ Michael Barnes. *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*. 2002, p74

¹³⁵ Emmanuel Levinas. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. 1969, p195.

¹³⁶ Ibid, p79

While Levinas' conception of the infinite other more or less dethrones the Husserlian cogito, Ricoeur presents a Nietzschean position¹³⁷ in *Oneself As Another* which shatters the exalted cogito's hyper-certainty as mere illusion. Nietzsche's attack against the above foundational claim to philosophy is based on his critique of language in which philosophy expresses itself. For Nietzsche, language is figurative and is thus reputed to be deceitful. It is a paradox in a double sense: "first in that from the opening lines, life, apparently taken in a referential and nonfigural sense, is taken as the source of the fable by which it sustains itself".¹³⁸ Secondly, language is paradoxical in that "Nietzsche's own discourse on truth as a lie ought to be drawn into the abyss of the paradox of the liar. But Nietzsche is precisely the thinker who assumes this paradox to the end".¹³⁹ Thus for Nietzsche, this turn is "missed by the commentators who take the apology of life, of the will to power, to be the revelation of a new immediacy, substituted in the very place and with the same foundational claims of the cogito".¹⁴⁰

In consequence, Nietzsche asserted that the Cartesian certainty is an illusion because in Descartes' effort to establish an Archimedean point from which he can freely inspect the world, certain forces, certain will to power, already condition the way Descartes regards the data.¹⁴¹ The cogito therefore "flatters itself that it can gain a transparent view of itself, that it can set itself on display for reflection but this self-consciousness is actually self-deception".¹⁴² For Nietzsche, the human being is an animal who has cultivated the illusions of culture and civilization but the bestial nature remains and this is what underlines the cogito.¹⁴³ Thus, truth is not the correspondence between signs and reality as the cogito implies. "Reality is just a matter of conventions that we fit to our

¹³⁷ Ricoeur presents the views of Nietzsche, Freud and Marx as representing what he calls the "hermeneutic of suspicion" because of the way they attempt to expose false consciousness. Even though he refers to them collectively as the masters of suspicion; in *Oneself As Another* (1992), Ricoeur presents Nietzsche alone as Descartes "privileged Adversary" (Brian Gregor. *A Philosophical Anthropology of the Cross: The Cruciform Self*. 2013, p24)

¹³⁸ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p12

¹³⁹ Ibid, p12

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p12

¹⁴¹ Friedrich Nietzsche. *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*. 1968, p119-130

¹⁴² Brian Gregor. *A Philosophical Anthropology of the Cross: The Cruciform Self*. 2013, p24

¹⁴³ Ibid, p24

preferences”,¹⁴⁴ and so truth is the obligation to lie according to these conventions. There is no factual reality beyond these conventions. All we have are interpretations.¹⁴⁵

From the above discourses, one finds a dialectic tension between Descartes’ “exalted cogito” and Nietzsche’s “shattered cogito”.¹⁴⁶ Even though Ricoeur agrees with Nietzsche’s criticism of the Cartesian tradition (in the sense of a hermeneutic of suspicion), he does not give in to the Nietzschean total dissolution of the cogito. According to Ricoeur, one may not be able to attain an absolute certainty about the cogito but one can reach some degree of certainty about it through *attestation*.¹⁴⁷ He defines *attestation* as a kind of belief “but not a doxic belief in the sense in which doxa (belief) has less standing than episteme”.¹⁴⁸ Whereas “a doxic belief is implied in the grammar of ‘I believe that’ *attestation* belongs to the grammar of ‘I believe in.’”¹⁴⁹ It connotes the sense of credence, a belief-in and trust. It is linked with testimony “inasmuch as it is in the speech of the one giving testimony that one believes”.¹⁵⁰ In other words, “when I attest to something, I not only believe that but I believe in something. It is more a statement of confidence and conviction than knowledge and certainty”.¹⁵¹

Attestation is “placed at an equal distance” between the “exalted cogito” and the “shattered cogito”. This however does not suggest that it is placed in an exact midpoint between the two. Rather, it implies that *attestation* occupies an epistemic and ontological position beyond the alternatives provided by the exalted cogito and its demolition.¹⁵² To express it symbolically, Greisch asserts that Ricoeur’s idea of *attestation* implies that the

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, p24

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, p24

¹⁴⁶ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p16

¹⁴⁷ For Ricoeur, “*attestation* defines the sort of certainty that hermeneutics claim, not only with respect to the epistemic exaltation of the cogito in Descartes, but also with respect to its humiliation in Nietzsche and his successors” (Ibid, p21)

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, p21

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, p21

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p21

¹⁵¹ David Kaplan. *Ricoeur’s Critical Theory*. 2003, p92

¹⁵² Jean Greisch. “Testimony and Attestation” in *Paul Ricoeur: The Hermeneutics of Action*. 1996, p84-85

cogito of *attestation* is neither a triumphant cogito as with the Cartesians or a crushed cogito as per Nietzsche but a wounded cogito that is capable of believing in itself.¹⁵³

This concept of *attestation* serves as the basis for Ricoeur's development of the hermeneutics of the self. For Ricoeur, "*attestation* is fundamentally the *attestation* of the self".¹⁵⁴ It is a "trust in the power to say, in the power to do, in the power to recognize oneself as a character in a narrative, in the power, finally, to respond to accusation in the form of the accusative".¹⁵⁵ *Attestation* is "assurance of being oneself acting and suffering".¹⁵⁶ This assurance remains the ultimate recourse against all suspicion. It provides the epistemological response to the question "what knowledge does the self have about itself?" In response, the self is seen as the being that is certain that it is both an agent and a patient. Ontologically, if it is asked: "who is the self?" For Ricoeur, the self is "the assurance – the credence and the trust – of existing in the mode of selfhood".¹⁵⁷

According to Ricoeur, this assurance or confidence is the ultimate recourse against all suspicion; even if it is always in some sense received from another, it is always self-*attestation*. "It is a self-*attestation* that every – linguistic, praxis, narrative and prescriptive – will preserve the question 'who?' from being replaced by the question 'what?' or 'why?'"¹⁵⁸ *Attestation* is credence without any guarantee but also a trust greater than any suspicion. The certainty of *attestation* is not a scientific one but a trust, a confidence, an assurance that cannot be demolished completely by suspicion.

Within the context of Christian-Muslim dialogue, Christology is one of the most contentious theological subjects which sometimes divide the two religions irreconcilably. This is because whereas Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the "Son of God" (human and divine), Muslims believe that this very Jesus is only a "prophet of Allah". The Islamic doctrine of the *Tawhid* (the oneness of God) serves as the basis from which God is understood as absolutely transcendent. Since there is only one God (Surah 5:73) in Islam,

¹⁵³ Ibid, p86

¹⁵⁴ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p22

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p22

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, p22

¹⁵⁷ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p302

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, p23

Jesus only functions as a messenger or prophet of God within the context of the *Tawhid*. This underscores the Islamic truths about Christology. In contrast, the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity also serves as the formidable grounds on which Jesus Christ is understood as the “Son of God” (the second person of the Holy Trinity).

Consequently, when one focuses on the right claimant of Christological truths between Christianity and Islam, one only ends up in a hotbed for theological confrontations. As Pratt puts it, “not only have internal theological debates and discussions been hotbeds of high emotions and deep dissent but such engagement between the religions...have been equally, if not more so, contentious and fraught”.¹⁵⁹ As religions of belief, the theologies of Islam and Christianity constitute self-enclosed systems of meaning and doctrine which can only be measured by their internal logic and coherence.¹⁶⁰ Here, the truth claims of one religion cannot be used as the standard of measurement for the truthfulness of another. The attempts to engage in such forms of dialogue would only lead to parallel monologues.

Thus, what is required today is the kind of Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology which allows the other to tell their stories about the life and mission of Jesus Christ in a mutual atmosphere of give and take – a conversation which is neither defined by Cartesian style of the “exalted cogito” nor shaped by the Nietzschean sense of it. As we indicated earlier on, whereas the Christian and Muslim understandings of Jesus Christ coherently fit into their respective systems of belief and narratives, none of the systems can be used as the yardstick for judging the truthfulness of the other.¹⁶¹ Hence, the attempt to engage the two religions in dialogue based on exclusive truth claims can only lead to a context of claim and counterclaim and at the end, the mutual dismissal of the other’s viewpoint.

In this way, what is needed in Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology is dialogue as *attestation* whereby Christians and Muslims attest to their respective truth

¹⁵⁹ Douglas Pratt. *The Challenge of Islam*. 2005, p203

¹⁶⁰ Catherine Cornille. “Meaning and Truth in Dialogue between Religions” in Depoortere, F & Lambkin, M. (Eds.). *The Question of Theological Truth. Philosophical and Interreligious Perspectives*. 2012, p137-139

¹⁶¹ Douglas Pratt. *The Challenge of Islam*. 2005, p101

claims on Christology within the overall process of dialogue as an exercise in learning from and about the other. Here, the question is not who is right about Christology but what can be learnt from the story the other tells about Jesus Christ? In other words, this form of *attestation* is one of mutual sharing of testimonies of one's beliefs on Christology, while maintaining some degree of openness to learn from the testimonies of the other. The purpose is the interest to learn from and about the other and to grow as a consequence of this learning. As Catherine Cornille puts it, "such a process of religious learning and growth is at the heart of the discipline of comparative theology, which may be regarded as the systematic expression or mode of interreligious dialogue".¹⁶² As an exercise in learning from and about the other, we assert that a dialogue guided by this notion of *attestation* is far more likely to succeed than the often debative and confrontational forms of dialogue. A dialogue between two competing "exalted cogitos" only lead to dialogical aporias but a dialogue base on *attestation* has the potential for mutual learning and enrichment.

While we argue for the case of *attestation* as the appropriate method of dialogue as an exercise in learning, there are questions that confront the comparativist when engaging in dialogue as an exercise in learning. In other words, if learning about the other leads to learning about oneself, then the question is: "how can the other's self-enclosed systems of belief become the context for reflection about one's beliefs? As Barnes puts it, "how precisely is faith deepened – and what is learnt?"¹⁶³ Furthermore, what becomes of the identity of the other after this learning? Does it remain the same or it is a matter of becoming and growing – and thus of change and transformation? If the latter obtains, how does it occur without the self losing itself?

We shall respond to these questions with the aid of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self expressed in *idem*, *ipse* and *narrative identities*. By engaging these three aspects of personal identity, we shall argue that they disclose the possibilities of the intertwinement of personal narratives in contexts where they are considered exclusive of each other. By engaging in this form of dialogue as an exercise in learning, one might be surprised, to borrow Leirvik's words, at how "dialogical overtones in Bakhtin's sense may strike a note

¹⁶² Catherine Cornille. "Meaning and Truth in Dialogue between Religions." 2012, p138

¹⁶³ Michael Barnes. *Interreligious Learning*. 2012, x

anywhere in the scale between parody, polemics and affirmations”.¹⁶⁴ We shall first of all, argue that such a disclosure is in itself an exercise in learning about a subject which has remained contentious in Christian-Muslim relations (Christology).

Secondly, while being committed to their traditions and open to learn from the traditions of the other, when the content of these disclosures lead to the common cognition of common values which require collective actions in response to them, then dialogue as an exercise in learning is all the more successful on the basis of its goal. Here, the other’s tradition-specific understanding of Christology does not change per se. What may change as a consequence of the dialogue is their mutual interrelationship – which is transformed from disparate actions to collective action. As a starting point, let us first of all, see how Ricoeur’s views on *idem*, *ipse* and *narrative identities* prepare the grounds for the possibility of Christian-Muslim conversations on Christology.

2.4.2. The Two Poles of Personal Identity

In *Oneself As Another*, Ricoeur identifies two modes of personal identity: *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity. While *idem*-identity is characterized by sameness or the permanent features of things, *ipse*-identity concerns the self-constancy needed for keeping one’s word. For Ricoeur, these two modes of identity define two modes of permanence in time.¹⁶⁵ Ricoeur presents character as conveying the equivocalness or double valence of the mode of identity as sameness and selfhood. Hence, the self is the embodiment of *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity; and *narrative identity* holds together the dialectics of *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity in the person. Let us begin this hermeneutic journey by examining Ricoeur’s notion of *idem*, *ipse* and narrative identities.

2.4.2.1. The Mode of the Self as *Idem*-identity

In real life experience we normally distinguish one person from another by their appearances. Their body and character which differentiate them from one another, gives

¹⁶⁴ Leirvik, Oddbjørn. *The Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*. 2011, p16 & Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. 1986, 92, 93-107

¹⁶⁵ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p116

them a specific identity. Ricoeur identifies this form of identity as sameness or *idem*-identity. Identity here is viewed as either a state of being the same or a state of being oneself or one thing and not another. According to Ricoeur, *idem*-identity is a constituent of personal identity, which is stable and sedimented in the person. Ricoeur presents four criteria by which sameness can be understood: numerical identity, qualitative identity uninterrupted continuity and permanence in time.¹⁶⁶

Numerical identity connotes the sense of oneness or unity as opposed to plurality. In other words, “we say of two occurrence of a thing, designated by an invariable noun in ordinary language, that they do not form two different things but ‘one and the same’ thing”.¹⁶⁷ For Ricoeur, “this first component of the notion of identity corresponds to the notion of identification, understood as the reidentification of the same which makes cognition recognition: the same thing twice, *n* times”.¹⁶⁸

Qualitative identity relates to similarity over difference. According to Ricoeur, qualitative identity relates to the category of extreme resemblance where for instance, “we say that *x* and *y* are wearing the same suits – clothes that are so similar that they are interchangeable with no noticeable difference”.¹⁶⁹ These two components of identity apply when we speak of the physical identity of a person. “We have no trouble recognizing someone who simply enters and leaves, appears, disappears and reappears”.¹⁷⁰ Hence, qualitative identity helps us to resolve problems where numerical identity fails. For instance, in a case where one is unsure about whether or not two appearances correspond to “one and the same thing” as indicated earlier, one can resort to the criterion of qualitative identity to ascertain their resemblance.¹⁷¹

But how do we know that the person standing here in court is the author of a crime committed ten years ago? This question exposes the weakness in qualitative identity because changes may have occurred in the appearance of the person after ten years.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, p116-118

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, p116

¹⁶⁸ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p116

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, p16

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, p116-117

¹⁷¹ Paul Ricoeur. “Narrative Identity” in *Philosophy Today* 35:1 (1991), p74

According to Ricoeur, “the weakness of this criterion of similitude, in the case of a great distance in time, suggests that we appeal to another criterion, one which belongs to the third component of the notion of identity, namely uninterrupted continuity”.¹⁷² It helps us to identify persons or things in spite of change over time.¹⁷³ This explains why we can say of an oak tree that it is the same from the acorn to the fully developed tree. This form of continuity “rest upon the ordered series of small changes, which, taken one by one, threaten resemblance without destroying it”.¹⁷⁴

Consequently, Ricoeur sees time within the context of uninterrupted continuity as “a factor of dissemblance, of diversity and of difference. The threat time “represents for identity is not entirely dissipated unless we can posit at the basis of similitude and uninterrupted continuity, a principle of permanence in time”.¹⁷⁵ The principle of permanence in time could be seen in the example of a “tool” which maintains its structure despite the replacement of all its parts; or in the permanence of the genetic code of a biological individual. What remains permanent in these two subjects is their structure; and “structure” reflects the sense of permanence in time.¹⁷⁶

Permanence in time is the most complete criterion of identity as sameness. While numerical and qualitative identity do not properly appropriate the problem of time, identity as uninterrupted continuity takes into consideration the time problematic but leaves identity as sameness with the difficulty of following the trajectory of a thing through time. However, the criterion of permanence in time resolves the time problematic in that it focuses on the structure of a thing, which remains the same through time.

Having considered the four criteria that determine *idem*-identity as sameness, Ricoeur then sought to find out whether there is a form of permanence in time which is not simply the schema of the category of substance. In other words, “is there a form of permanence in time which can be connected to the question ‘who?’ inasmuch as it is irreducible to the question ‘what?’ Is there a form of permanence in time that is a response

¹⁷² Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p117

¹⁷³ Ibid, p117

¹⁷⁴ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p117

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, p117

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, p117

to the question ‘whom am I?’”¹⁷⁷ His focus here is on persons (who?) and not things (what?).

For Ricoeur, when we speak of ourselves, we in fact have two models of permanence in time available to us. These are: character and keeping one’s word. The polarity between these two models of permanence in time with respect to persons results from the fact that “the permanence of character expresses the mutual overlapping of the problematic of *idem* and *ipse*, while faithfulness in keeping one’s word marks the extreme gap between the permanence of the self and that of the same.”¹⁷⁸ As we shall later discover, Ricoeur will present narrative identity as the mediation between the poles of character where *idem* and *ipse* tend to coincide and that of self-maintenance where selfhood frees itself from sameness.

Ricoeur also presents character as expressing another kind of sameness which constitutes an aspect of personal identity. He defines character as “the set of distinctive marks which permit the reidentification of a human individual as being the same”¹⁷⁹ or “the set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognised”.¹⁸⁰ As a set of permanent dispositions, whereas character gives to personal identity the stability which is proper to identity as sameness, it also expresses a dimension of *ipseity* through the permanent dispositions in the person who answers the question “whom am I?” It demonstrates an overlap between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity.

If we understand character as the set of permanent dispositions in a person, then character reflects the sense of numerical identity in that it can be identified and re-identified as “one and the same thing” in a person. It also expresses qualitative identity because it defines the features in the individual which allows for easy comparison of one character with another. For example, one could say to his long time friend: “you really haven’t changed after all these years”. Uninterrupted continuity also helps us to see the same person we knew some years ago despite some changes in them (physical or

¹⁷⁷ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p118

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p118

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p119

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p121

psychological). The permanence in time of character is situated within “the set of distinctive marks” that remain constant in the person.

Ricoeur identifies habits and acquired identifications as the two main constituents of character.¹⁸¹ According to him, what we do and learn by doing affect our habits and habits define to some extent, who we are and guide our orientations. They are formed without the conscious attention to the question; “who to be?” Habits are the sedimentations of practices in a person. These sedimented practices somewhat form a “second nature” in the person. Habits have a twofold valence: habits that are formed and habits that are acquired.¹⁸² These two forms of habits give character a history – “a history in which sedimentation tends to cover over the innovation which preceded it, even to the point of abolishing the latter”.¹⁸³

Character also relates to “the acquired identifications by which the other enters into the composition of the same”.¹⁸⁴ These acquired identifications denote the values, norms, ideals, models and heroes in which a person or community assumes as proper and recognize itself by.¹⁸⁵ These identifications clearly display how one takes on otherness and makes it one’s own. In other words, through acquired identifications, what was initially alien to a person or the community now becomes part of it. In this way the person or community begins to understand these identifications as necessary for their survival. This sense of necessity elicits an element of loyalty that is incorporated into character and makes it turn towards fidelity and hence, towards maintaining the self. How does this aspect of identity apply in the case of the Christian and Muslim tradition-specific understandings of Christology?

We indicated at the start of this chapter that Christology “discusses the evaluation of Jesus Christ in respect of who he was and the role he played in the divine plan”.¹⁸⁶ Within this evaluative context, while Christians believe that Jesus is God and the son of God, Muslims believe that he is only a prophet of Allah. These different theological

¹⁸¹ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p121

¹⁸² Ibid, p121

¹⁸³ Ibid, p121

¹⁸⁴ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, 121

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, p121

¹⁸⁶ Brown Raymond, E. *Introduction to New Testament Christology*. 1994, p3

evaluations of Jesus along with other religious doctrines, have contributed in forming the horizons which shape the Christian and Muslim understandings of Christology. If Ricoeur pointed out that *idem*-identity denotes sameness (the set of lasting dispositions which one does not choose but by which one is recognised), then Muslims and Christians equally share this dimension of sameness with their views on Christology. Here, sameness constitutes the religious practices, rites, symbols, customs and traditions which the adherent does not choose but from which his/her religious identity is derived.

As Moyaert indicated, Christian identity for instance means the “identification with particular Christian norms, values, doctrines, biblical texts, rituals and the like”.¹⁸⁷ Here, Christians believe in the Holy Trinity because of their experience of God as Father, Son (Jesus Christ) and Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is therefore constitutively part of the “deposit of faith” that has been handed on from the Apostles to successive generations of Christians. It contributes to shaping the identity of the “good” Christian. Within this doctrine, Jesus Christ can only be understood as the son of God and saviour of the world. Hence, the belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Bible, the norms and practice of Christian ritual, all give expression to the identity of the Christian. They represent the *idem* aspects of Christian identity.

In Islam too, belief in the Qur’an, the profession of the Shahada and observing the five pillars of the religion among other religious practices shape the identity of the Muslim. For instance, the obligation to acknowledge the *Tawhid* forms the root of Islamic monotheism. The confession that “there is no god but One God” (Surah 5:73) is a fundamental statement of Islamic belief and all Muslims are identified by that confession. Hence, the Shahada, the doctrines, the ritual prayers and other practices all constitute the *idem*-dimension of the believer’s life in Islam. They are the same for all Muslims within their tradition-specific contexts. As Moyaert observes, “*idem* is not added to the faith commitment but is constitutive of it”.¹⁸⁸

In this way, “by reading certain texts, adhering to certain rules, agreeing with specific doctrines and by performing certain religious practices which rather remain stable,

¹⁸⁷ Marianne Moyaert. “Absorption or Hospitality.” 2010, p79

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, p79

the believer (Christian or Muslim) submits his/her life to God”.¹⁸⁹ Though sedimented in the believer, this *idem* dimension of religious identity is delicate in the sense that it is the immediate aspect of every religion which could be in danger of being lost in the face of religious plurality and interreligious dialogue. As a consequence, Ricoeur notes in a different context that some religions tend towards a “protective withdrawal” from the religious other because of the fear of losing this aspect of their identity.¹⁹⁰

Within the context of dialogue as an exercise in learning, we agree with Moyaert that “there is thus no single reason to formulate a negative judgement about the *idem* dimension of religious identity”.¹⁹¹ Whereas for Moyaert, the reason is that “the *idem* aspect is not added to faith commitment but is constituted of it”, for us, another compelling reason also lies in the fact that religious truths are self-enclosed systems of meaning (*Holy Trinity* vis-a-vis *Tawhid*) which can only be measured by their internal coherence. Hence, no particular system (whether Islam or Christianity) can be used as a standard of measurement for the truthfulness of the other. The *idem*-identity of the Christian or Muslim believer very often forms their second nature – the sedimented part of their identity which each protects at all cost. It is for this reason that comparative theology always emphasizes that when engaging these aspects of the religion in dialogue, one must treat with care, caution and respect for the elements thereof undergoing comparison. If the *idem* aspect of personal identity constitutes the sameness aspects of the religion, then what is the *ipse* aspect of the religions?

2.4.2.2. The Mode of the Self as *ipse*-Identity

When asked: “who are you?” people may respond to this question by appealing to the “what?” of themselves. For instance, when asked “who are you as a Muslim?” the response is likely to be that: “I believe in the one God and in Muhammad as his Messenger”. Of course this response reflects the Muslim confession of the Shahada which is at the heart of Islamic faith. However, while every Muslim confesses the Shahada, not all Muslims live out the Shahada in the same way. In other words, there are varying degrees in their

¹⁸⁹ Marianne Moyaert. *Fragile Identities*. 2011, p254

¹⁹⁰ Paul Ricoeur. “Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe.” 1996, p4

¹⁹¹ Marianne Moyaert. *Fragile Identities*. 2011, p255

submission to the will of Allah. The same applies to Christians in their confession of faith in God as Holy Trinity. One always finds variations in the living out of what is confessed as faith in Christianity. Thus, we could say that it is not just the mere confession of faith in God that matters but also the living out of what we confess – this makes us truly Christian or Muslim.

In this way, even though we often answer to the “who?” of ourselves by appealing to the “what”, the “what?” dimension of ourselves (*idem*) does not fully express who we are as Muslims or Christians. There is more to the Christian or Muslim life than just the mere adherence to religious practices, customs and norms. This suggests that there is another aspect of identity which reflects, for instance, the Muslim’s degree of commitment to the confession of the Shahada. Commitment is directly linked to the Muslim’s promise to keep and live the Shahada in every circumstance. Here, when I promise to observe the Shahada, I affirm that in times of changes, disappointments and motivations that lead me to contrary alternatives in respect of my belief in the one God and in Muhammad as his messenger, I will still hold firm to this belief.

This dimension of the self-maintenance of the believer is at the heart of Ricoeur’s notion of *ipseity* or *ipse-identity*. *Iipse-identity* is another mode of personal identity which conforms to the criteria of permanence in time. It is defined by the self-constancy necessary for keeping one’s promise or faithfulness to one’s word.¹⁹² According to Ricoeur, a person’s commitment to what he/she promises, even in the face of danger, disappointments, uncertainties and new opportunities, demonstrates that the person is reliable and can be counted on.¹⁹³ In Marianne Moyaert’s view, Ricoeur believes that this reliability and self-constancy is the condition for lasting relationships because “people are not characters; they are relational beings. A human being becomes a person only when others can count on him or her”.¹⁹⁴

While with character the identity of the self is supported by habits and acquired identifications; in keeping one’s promise, the self is affirmed without the need for the

¹⁹² Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p, p119

¹⁹³ Ibid, p124

¹⁹⁴ Marianne Moyaert. “Absorption or Hospitality.” 2010, p78.

permanence entailed in character. Keeping one's promise "does not appear as a challenge to time, a denial of change: even if my desires were to change, even if I were to change my opinion or my inclination, 'I will hold firm.'"¹⁹⁵ Here, it is not necessary for promise to be placed in the context of being-towards-death but its ethical justification suffices for itself: "a justification which can be derived from the obligation to... respond to the trust that the other places in my faithfulness".¹⁹⁶

Thus, while sameness refers to the sedimentations of the self i.e. of habits and attitudes that are part of us, promise-keeping sometimes breaks with the past and affirms an identity that is grounded on the innovations of the present. For instance, my promise to start praying regularly and going to Church every Sunday after fifty years of not doing so, demonstrates a break with my way of life in the past and a commitment to a new beginning which presents a future challenge. The challenge is that despite the disruptions in the history of my sameness (my cultivated habits of not praying regularly and not going to Church every Sunday) because of my promise to be faithful, I will hold firm to the promise made. Here, the break between *idem* and *ipse* identities lies in the fact that the sameness of one's life now gives way to a new way of life defined by the promise to be faithful to God through regular prayers and attending Sunday services. How then is *ipse* identity related to the question of religious identity?

Even though we mentioned that to be Christian or Muslim, is to adhere to the doctrines, rites, customs and practices of Christianity or Islam, these *idem* aspects of the religions do not define the totality of the identity of the Christian or Muslim. Mere conformity to the *idem*-dimension of the religion is not enough. It demands a certain sense of commitment which goes deeper than mere conformity to rituals. As Moyaert implied, religious identity also implies a relationship with God – a commitment to God which is expressed through the practice of faith.¹⁹⁷ This commitment establishes a living relationship between the believer and God such that one continuously chooses to be in that relationship amidst changes, disappointments or contrary motivations. This is what

¹⁹⁵ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p124

¹⁹⁶ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, 124

¹⁹⁷ Marianne Moyaert. *Fragile Identities*. 2011, p255

Ricoeur calls, “the self-constancy necessary for keeping one’s promise”.¹⁹⁸ Here, Moyaert explains that through this commitment, the believer binds his or her life to God, as it were and says, ‘whatever happens, I promise to remain faithful to you.’¹⁹⁹

Thus, *ipse*-identity grows from the creative involvement of the adherent in co-fashioning his/her identity within the community of faith on the one hand and on the other, his/her experience of life and encounter with others. In this way, faithfulness to God is not merely limited to *idem*-identity but it goes beyond just the traditions to seek God where God can be found. In other words, to be a Christian for instance, implies as Moyaert puts it, “encountering God in reading the Bible, in performing daily rituals and maintaining the tradition on the one hand and on the other hand, letting God break open the tradition so that God’s transcendence does not become fastened down to it”.²⁰⁰ It is being open to where God calls and sends; for God’s transcendence means God speaks where God wills (both within and without the traditions). It is this inspiration which sometimes stimulates the self to want to know and learn from what God is saying in the traditions of the religious other. Since these two poles of identity are operative in the same person, Ricoeur asserts that narrative identity keeps the two poles dialectically creative in the fashioning of one’s identity. What then is narrative identity?

2.4.3. Narrative Identity in the Formation of Personal Identity

According to Ricoeur, personal identity is constituted by the two poles of identity we have discussed above. The self is the embodiment of these two poles and narrative identity holds them together in the self. Ricoeur believes that there is a relationship between narrative and life. According to him, human life becomes more readable when interpreted in the context of the stories people tell about themselves.²⁰¹ Hence, life can be understood narratively. In *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur demonstrates how narrative identity evolves through his theory of the “threefold mimesis”.²⁰² Though he takes up the same project in *Oneself As*

¹⁹⁸ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p119.

¹⁹⁹ Marianne Moyaert. “Absorption or Hospitality.” 2010, p80

²⁰⁰ Ibid, p80

²⁰¹ Paul Ricoeur. “Narrative Identity” in *Philosophy Today*. 35:1 (1991), p73

²⁰² What is significant in Ricoeur’s “theory of mimesis” is that, Ricoeur shows the essential relationship between time and narrative. For him, time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a

Another, we shall follow closely how this theory serves to elucidate his concept of narrative identity as a mediating principle. The clarity that *Oneself As Another* brings to this context also remains significant to the discourse since Ricoeur reckons that his work in *Oneself As Another* somewhat serves to clarify some of the issues raised in *Time and Narrative*.²⁰³

According to Ricoeur, the life of a person or community is understood through the narratives they tell about themselves. Narratives are essentially temporal because they can only be mediated through temporal experience.²⁰⁴ In his analysis of Aristotle's *Poetics* that extends beyond tragedy, Ricoeur focused attention on emplotment and mimetic activity to demonstrate the relationship between *Time and Narrative* and how human actions are prefigured, configured and refigured narrative.²⁰⁵ For Ricoeur, "imitating or representing is a mimetic activity inasmuch as it produces something, namely, the organization of events by emplotment".²⁰⁶ The plot is the model of concordance which is characterized by completeness, wholeness and an appropriate magnitude.²⁰⁷

Concordance also includes discordance in the sense of the phenomenon of a tragic action which Aristotle calls reversal. In tragedy, reversal turns good fortunes into bad ones yet this direction can also be reversed. Hence, the art of composition consists in turning discordance into concordance.²⁰⁸ Ricoeur demonstrates this through the theory of the threefold mimesis – *mimesis1* refers to prefigurations, *mimesis2* refers to configuration and *mimesis3* relates to refrigeration or the reader's reception of the narrative composition. Without the intention to go into the details of these mimetic activities, what is significant to note in *mimesis1* is that many events and incidences occur in our lives (prefiguration of narratives). So, to compose a plot of our lives, it is first necessary to take into consideration its semantic, symbolic and temporal structure.

narrative, and a narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes the condition of temporal existence (Paul Ricoeur. *Time and Narrative Volume I*. 1984, p3, 52)

²⁰³ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p140

²⁰⁴ Paul Ricoeur. *Time and Narrative Volume I*. 1984, p3

²⁰⁵ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p140-160

²⁰⁶ Paul Ricoeur. *Time and Narrative Volume I*. 1984, p34

²⁰⁷ Ibid, p38

²⁰⁸ Ibid, p43

In *mimesis2*, Ricoeur shows that the events and incidents which occur in our lives only make meaning when they are composed into narratives (narrative configuration). In other words, *mimesis2* constitutes the configuration of actions accomplished through “emplotment”.²⁰⁹ Understood as “a well constructed history”, emplotment connotes the synthesis of heterogeneous elements like the agent, the action, accidental or anticipated configurations, interactions, means and outcomes that are found in a story. Thus, configuration as emplotment refers to the art of composition which mediates between concordance and discordance through the “synthesis of the heterogeneous which accounts for the diverse mediations performed by the plot”.²¹⁰ Here, the world of action configured by emplotment has an ontological status of “being-as”,²¹¹ and “being-as” implies that the world of the narrative is the real world as it is given. But this world can only be reached when the text is received by the reader (*mimesis3*).

Hence, *mimesis3* refers to the reception of the narrative by the reader. It concerns the moment when the narrative is received through dialogue. According to Ricoeur, narratives achieve their full development only in the intersection between the world of the text and the world of the reader – that which Gadamer in a different context calls the fusion of horizons.²¹² Here, the world of the text unfolds itself through the mediation of the world of the reader. The reader fulfils the meaning of the text by dwelling in the text’s world.²¹³ As Ricoeur puts it, what is interpreted in the text “is the proposing of a world that I might inhabit and into which I might project my ownmost powers”.²¹⁴ In other words, by reading the narrative, the reader is enriched by the text’s world of possibilities.

This triggers a mutual dialogue between the world of the text and the world of the reader, which leads to the “fusion of horizons” of the reader and the text. The continual interaction between narrative and reader (implied in the interaction within *mimesis1*,

²⁰⁹ “Emplotment” is a borrowed term from Aristotle’s concept of “composition” which has a double meaning. On the one hand, it could mean a “fable,” yet on the other; it also means a “plot” in the sense of a “well constructed history.” Ricoeur borrows the second meaning. (Paul Ricoeur. “Life: A Story in Search of a Narrator” in *Facts and Values*. 1986, p122 & *Oneself As Another*. 1992, 141-43)

²¹⁰ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p141

²¹¹ Ibid, p80

²¹² Hans-Georg Gadamer. *Truth and Methods*. 1990, p306-307, 374-375

²¹³ Paul Ricoeur. “Life: A Story in Search of a Narrator” in *Facts and Values*. 1986, p126

²¹⁴ Paul Ricoeur. *Time and Narrative Volume I*. 1984, p81

*mimesis*2 and *mimesis*3) gives rise to what one might call the circular mimetic movement (the hermeneutic circle) in which the prefigured experience of *mimesis*1 is configured in *mimesis*2 and re-figured in *mimesis*3 in a circular or more accurately, in a spiral form.²¹⁵ In other words, the experience which comes from the world of action (already mediated by narrative) is configured in narration which in turn re-figures the world of experience. This leads to a continuous enrichment of the world of action.

Ricoeur's notion of narrative identity presupposes this mimetic activity – a narrated experience that is mediated by emplotment and re-figured through the reception of narratives. In other words, “to state the identity of an individual or a community is to answer the question, ‘who did this?’ ‘Who is the agent, the author?’”²¹⁶ For Ricoeur, the answer to this question resides in narratives. To answer the question “who?” means to tell the story of a life. The story told tells about the action of the “who” and the identity of this “who” is a narrative identity.²¹⁷ As a transition from narrative to character, Ricoeur asserts that emplotment is not only applicable to a narrative but also to a character. For Ricoeur, personal identity is comparable to the “emplotment of characters”.²¹⁸ The emplotment of characters consists in the different elements which are commonly present in the story of one's life: a person's interaction with others, the actions that a person performs and his/her physical and psychological features which together constitute the identity of the person.

Hence, narrative identity is understood as the formation of one's identity by the integration of one's life experiences into an internalized evolving story of the self which provides the individual with a sense of unity and purpose. It is not a stable or a seamless identity but a continuous effort whereby a self reinterpreting identity is repeated in response to different encounters with different others. Ricoeur emphasized here that “the art of storytelling is the art of exchanging experience”.²¹⁹ By narrating the stories of our

²¹⁵ Ricoeur talks of a “hermeneutic arc” that recognizes the need for a starting point in the hermeneutic process (Ibid, p72 & Vanhoozer, Kevin, J. (editor). *Postmodern Theology*. 2003, p81-82)

²¹⁶ Paul Ricoeur. *Time and Narrative III*. 1988, p246

²¹⁷ Paul Ricoeur. *Time and Narrative I*. 1984, p246

²¹⁸ Ricoeur sees in narrative identity, not just as the “emplotment of action,” but also as the “emplotment of characters” where “an emplotted character is someone seeking his or her identity.” (Paul Ricoeur. “Pastoral Praxeology, Hermeneutics, and Identity” in *Figuring The Sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination*. 1995, p309)

²¹⁹ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p164

lives, we soon realize that we are subjects in others' stories and others are subjects in our stories.²²⁰ We discover that our narratives are essentially interwoven with other narratives such that we find ourselves as characters in others' narratives and histories – we are our parents' child, our partner's partner, our friends' friend – and they are characters in our narratives.²²¹ So, through our encounter with others, we facilitate the articulation and direction of their narratives and they ours. How does this sense of narrativity apply in the case of Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology as an exercise in learning?

We indicated earlier that dialogue as an exercise in learning from and about the other, dialogue on Christology is facilitated by the method of *attestation* whereby Christians and Muslims share their mutual testimonies of faith about the life and mission of Jesus Christ. The purpose is for the interlocutors to learn and understand the other's narratives about Jesus and be enriched by this learning. It is a form of dialogue where Christians for instance, “are called not just to speak of the God who is revealed in Christ but to listen critically yet with generosity to what is spoken about God by the other”.²²² Islam and Christianity have unique narratives about the identity and mission of Jesus Christ. These narratives are constituted by the *idem* and *ipse* aspects of the religious identities of the believer. So, in sharing the story of one's life with the other, Christians and Muslims are called upon to know and be committed to the traditions that define their respective understandings of Jesus Christ while being open to listen to each other's narratives about Jesus.

Thus, dialogue as an exercise in learning concerns Christian-Muslim mutual exchange of narratives as a means of learning from and about the other's viewpoints. As Ricoeur indicated, by narrating the stories of our lives this way, we discover that our narratives are essentially interwoven with other narratives. Whereas we consider that the intertwinements of the Christian and Muslim narratives about Jesus Christ is not a compelling outcome to this form of dialogue as an exercise in learning, its occurrence will nonetheless be celebrated as part of the success of the dialogue. For instance, if the

²²⁰ Ibid, p141

²²¹ Paul Ricoeur. “Pastoral Praxeology, Hermeneutics, and Identity” in *Figuring The Sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination*. 1995, p310

²²² Michael Barnes. *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*. 2002, p23

dialogue leads to the disclosure of the similarities or differences between Christology in Islam and in Christianity as we shall see in chapter five, then dialogue is considered successful on the basis of its goal. Furthermore, if this exercise in learning also leads to the discovery of common values as we shall see in chapter six, then it is all the more worth-pursuing.

As its primary goal, dialogue as an exercise in learning focuses on knowing oneself profoundly, knowing the other authentically and living together more creatively. If learning from the other's tradition is supposed to lead to an enrichment of the self, what becomes of the identity of the self after such learning? In other words, what becomes of the identity of the comparative theologian who crosses over to different religious traditions to learn from them and be enriched by this learning? Does not the self or the other expose themselves to the danger of losing their identity through this form of learning? How does Ricoeur resolve this identity fragmentation in order to give the self a stable and definitive identity in its encounter with the other?

2.4.4. *Attestation in the Context of the Fragility of the Self*

From the discourse above, Ricoeur indicated that narrative identity is not a stable or seamless identity but a continuous effort whereby a self reinterpreting identity is repeated in response to different encounters with different others. This means that I can tell many stories about myself and read many interpretations into these stories. I can even read the narratives of my life from different perspectives and evaluate the stories others tell about me in different ways. So, in these different narratives I make for myself Ricoeur would ask "who am I?"²²³ These imaginative variations of the narratives of my life make me feel that I have no definitive or stable identity. I am just a bundle of influences that cannot be categorized under a single unit as my identity. If the self or the other has to live with these imaginative variations of itself, then it could be assimilated or absorbed as a consequence of its encounter with the other. How does Ricoeur resolve this problem of the fragmented self?

²²³ See Paul Ricoeur. "Pastoral Praxeology: Hermeneutics and Identity." 1995, p310

For Ricoeur, the capacity of the self to promise and to believe that it is the self that is acting and suffering through *attestation*, resolves its fragility to some extent. Through *attestation* the self can choose one narrative over another through its confidence that the chosen narrative better expresses who the self is. The capacity for the self to make such choices is informed by its embodiment as both *idem* and *ipse*. Since *idem* defines the sedimented part of the self, the self is capable of knowing that which conforms to its *idem*-identity and that which is alien to it. Since *ipse*-identity defines the self-maintenance achieved through promise-keeping, then through *attestation*, the self is capable of attesting to its defined identity against the variant possibilities of its identity construction.

Thus, narrative identity is made complete through *attestation*. It is an attested to identity – an identity constructed on the credence of the self in a particular narrative configuration as expressive of who the self is. So, in my encounter with the other which exposes me to many possibilities of identity construction; *attestation* as belief in, a commitment to and credence in, helps me to make informed choices as to which narrative variations conform to my true self identity.

Thus, the attested to self gives the self a foundation from which it encounters the other who equally has an attested to self, a foundation or a tradition. So by narrating or sharing the story of one's life through dialogue, one witnesses to one's identity as it pertains to this dialectic interplay of *idem* and *ipse* identities. As we mentioned earlier, the significance of this sharing of mutual testimonies of faith between the self and the other lies in how this could lead to the discovery of the intersubjective or interconnected character of their narratives or the sharpening of their awareness of how different their respective narratives are to each other. In whichever way this takes, dialogue as an exercise in learning from and about the other can be considered successful.

In conclusion, it must be emphasized here that Ricoeur never applied *Idem*, *ipse* and narrative identities to the specific contexts of Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology as we have done. He was aware of the problems of interreligious violence and conflicts among the religion. But he never applied his hermeneutics on personal identity to this particular area of interreligious dialogue. Consequently, by applying these aspects of personal identity to issues of interreligious dialogue, the interest is to see how they offer

the framework for reflecting on the challenges presented by dialogue as an exercise in learning. Narrating the stories of one's life through dialogue as an exercise in learning helps another to understand and learn from this story. Hence, the overarching question is: what can Christians and Muslims learn from each other from their respective tradition-specific understandings of Christology?

Before attending to the question above, it could also be asked: how can one understand religious texts, doctrines and practices of another religion in the light of the differences that exist between them? For George Lindbeck and the postliberal school, the intratextual nature of religious texts and doctrines do not permit the possibility of crossing over to another's tradition to understand texts without distorting them. If intratextuality implies that religious texts are context-driven, does this mean that meaningfulness is absolutely determined intratextually and that one cannot cross over to another tradition to learn texts and doctrines in their original religious context?

2.5. Comparative Theology and the Problem of Intratextuality

As an exercise in learning, comparative theology entails, as Clooney puts it, "a manner of learning that takes seriously diversity and tradition, openness and truth, allowing neither to decide the meaning of our religious situation without recourse to the other".²²⁴ It involves the crossing over to another religious tradition to critically understand its rituals, belief-systems, texts, norms and practices by critically correlating them with one's own tradition. However, how does comparative theology pursue this project in the light of the assertion that religious texts are intratextually determined? By text, we mean the written or spoken discourses which define the identities of the religions.

For instance, Islam and Christianity possess different classic texts which inform and define their respective theological understandings of Jesus Christ. As the Word of God/Allah, the Bible and Qur'an enjoy the authority to guide Christians and Muslims respectively in terms of what God demands of them and how they are to order their lives in response to this demand. Even though for both Christians and Muslims, the Bible and

²²⁴ Francis Clooney. *Comparative Theology*. 2010, p8

Qur'an are the Word(s) of God, each text contains different revelatory experiences, written by different authors, in different linguistic systems and in completely different cultural metric – giving rise to differences in narrative histories and ways of theologizing about God. Into this context of difference is Jesus Christ situated; common to both traditions as a historical person, yet different in the way he is construed.

On the one hand, the differences in texts, history and tradition of both religion signal the fact that the two traditions possess strong elements of intratextuality. Hence, it will be an act of immerse naiveté to simply assume that both sacred texts mean one and the same thing when studying about Jesus Christ. Yet, on the other hand, the common cognition that Jesus is not only a historical person but one who also uniquely played distinctive roles in both religions as proclaiming a unique message of/from God also draws in some elements of similarities. Thus, should similarities be compromised for reasons of difference? If dialogue entails commitment to the home tradition and openness to the tradition of the other, then what is the consequence of the postliberal theological stand on intratextuality for interreligious dialogue? We shall argue that comparative theology is built on the hermeneutic confidence that learning across traditions is possible, but not without challenges. It defends the irreducibility of the identity of the other, but argues for the possibility of understanding the other through dialogue.

Hence, by engaging George Lindbeck (intratextuality) and Paul Ricoeur (translation) in conversation, we hope to demonstrate how comparative theology responds to the challenge of intratextuality. Whereas we shall acknowledge Lindbeck's view that religious texts are intratextual to some extent, we shall also argue that one can reach a certain understanding of texts through translation.²²⁵ For Ricoeur, the power of translation makes communicability possible. In other words, translation always presupposes interpretation and texts can be interpreted and understood to some extent. We shall argue that while Lindbeck's stand serves to remind every theologian about the need to be sensitive to the unique meanings and functions texts play within particular religion,

²²⁵ By *translation*, we mean the communication of the meaning of texts from its source-language or tradition, to another language or tradition for easy comprehension by those outside of the original tradition.

Ricoeur views on translation re-engages religious texts in dialogue, aware that there can never be perfect translations.

Intratextuality defines that aspect of hermeneutics which asserts that religious text and meanings are untranslatable.²²⁶ Untranslatability refers to the understanding that religious meaning is located within a semiotic system. As Moyaert puts it, “religious words, practices and experiences derive their meaning from the religious language game from which they function. They can only be understood within their own religious context”.²²⁷ Thus, George Lindbeck’s cultural linguistic theory of religion emphasizes that religions are all-encompassing schemas on the basis of which all reality is given significance: i.e. a religion is “a comprehensive interpretive scheme embodied in myths or narratives and heavily ritualized”.²²⁸ So, only those who belong to this scheme and share its worldview can experience reality within it.²²⁹ For Lindbeck, the vocabulary of a religion includes symbols, concepts, rites, commandments and stories which only find their rightful meaning within the religion itself as a system.²³⁰

The Bible, for instance, functions as an authoritative narrative text that creates and imagines its own world and invites people to live in and through this world. So people who live outside the world of the Bible cannot properly interpret or understand this world. Here, meaning is inseparably connected to context which is intratextually determined.²³¹ In this way, Lindbeck asserted that if Christian language ultimately refers to Christ, then it is only Christians who can understand what it means to love God through Christ.²³² Saving faith is an explicit response to the Gospel of Christ. Thus, the essential task of theology today does not lie in the working out of connections between the Christian text and other religious text

²²⁶ Untranslatability refers to the understanding that, text, utterance and language have no equivalent meaning or understanding outside of their contexts. As a consequence, their meaning is only context-driven.

²²⁷ Marianne Moyaert. “Absorption or Hospitality.” 2010, p66

²²⁸ Lindbeck, George. *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*. 1984, p32

²²⁹ It must be emphasized here that, Lindbeck’s thesis on *untranslatability* has nothing to do with natural language or the translation of the Bible from Greek to English. His emphasis is on *religious language*, which for him materially constitutes the unsubstitutable memories and narratives which shape the identity of a religious community (Ibid, p423)

²³⁰ Marianne Moyaert. *Fragile Identities*. 2011, p133

²³¹ George Lindbeck. “The Gospel’s Uniqueness.” 1997, p424-426

²³² George Lindbeck. *The Nature of Doctrine*. 1984, p59

“but in understanding and describing the internal grammar of biblical, Christian life, speech and action”.²³³

As a matter of critique, one could say that Lindbeck’s stand on intratextuality underscores the need to respect the boundaries that separate the religions. Religions possess unique texts, traditions and horizons of interpretation and understanding of reality. Thus, one could see Lindbeck’s position as emphasizing the need to avoid the tendency to homogenize the differences between the religions into neat schemas of commonality. In this way, one would agree with Lindbeck that hermeneutical openness consists in recognizing the distance between the religions and respecting that distance. However, Lindbeck’s radical separation of the religions from each other leaves much to be desired. It only succeeds in inflating the “space-between” the self and the other, disallowing the possibility of dialogue between them. To borrow the words of Moyaert, what is left with Lindbeck’s position is “a broken middle with no hope of reconciliation”.²³⁴

In this way, intratextuality poses a difficult challenge to comparative theology and interreligious dialogue in that it creates a gulf that makes it impossible to cross over to another tradition to learn texts and religious doctrines. Thus, how does the hermeneutics of comparative theology negotiate this “space-between” to allow the possibility of dialogue? It is in response to this question that we turn to Ricoeur’s views on *translation*. The concept translation is commonly understood as the communication of the meaning of texts from one language to another. Understood interreligiously, Moyaert asserts that translation involves “explaining, clarifying and elucidating particular religious meanings by searching for correlations and possible analogies between the strange and the familiar language”.²³⁵ Thus, the process of translation demands that one does not “simply remove and abstract words, action, practices and doctrines out of their original context but reflect precisely on the way they... are embedded in the broader field of religious meaning”.²³⁶ Since translation always involves the explanation of one’s own religious texts to another, it constantly mediates between the familiar and the strange in order to make the transfer of

²³³ Marianne Moyaert. “Absorption or Hospitality.” 2010, p67

²³⁴ Ibid, p68

²³⁵ Marianne Moyaert. *Fragile Identities*. 2013, p220

²³⁶ Ibid, p221

meaning possible.²³⁷ If the communication of meaning is the goal of translation, then one can say that translation applies directly to both the “insider” and the “outsider” since both constantly seeks meaning as an exercise in understanding texts.

In “Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe”,²³⁸ Ricoeur asserts that the translation of one language to another “displays an irreducible pluralism which is infinitely desirable to protect”.²³⁹ Europe is neither interested in giving chance to another Esperanto which threatens it nor giving in to a single cultural language as the only means of communication. Unlike Lindbeck, Ricoeur asserts that the threat to Europe today lies in giving in to “the danger of incommunicability through a protective withdrawal of each culture into its own linguistic traditions”.²⁴⁰ Since Europe remains ineluctably polyglot, it is translation which makes communicability possible within its linguistic diversity. A person’s mother tongue does not lock him/her in an exclusive ethnic belonging but potentially opens him/her to the whole of humanity. Through our mother tongue, we learn other languages and become acquainted with other cultures.²⁴¹ Hence, language is not a closed system but always in a way, open to what is outside. Language makes dialogue possible and the possibility of dialogue makes mutual understanding possible.

In *On Translation*,²⁴² Ricoeur takes up the problem of translatability and untranslatability and seeks to work out the dialectics of the gain and the loss in meaning in translation. He first poses the question: how is it possible to mediate between two separate languages with different semantic resonances, incompatible syntactical structures and different lexical systems? These differences are so pronounced that they seem to make translation impossible. So, how is the transfer of meaning from one particular language to another possible? For Ricoeur, since a translator is a go-between – always mediating between the familiar and the strange, the discourses on untranslatability highlight the inevitable problems translators face in their exercise of translation.

²³⁷ Ibid, p220

²³⁸ Paul Ricoeur. “Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe.” 1996, p3-13

²³⁹ Ibid, p4

²⁴⁰ Ibid, p4

²⁴¹ Paul Ricoeur. *Freedom and Nature: The Fallible Man*. 1986, p19

²⁴² Paul Ricoeur. *On Translation*. 2006

The problems lie in the fact that the strangeness of the text always presents itself as a “lifeless block of resistance to translation”.²⁴³ This makes the desire for a perfect translation an illusion. But the absence of a perfect translation does not also annul the possibility of translation.²⁴⁴ Thus, one finds a tension between translatability and untranslatability – a tension which “corresponds to the somewhat uncomfortable situation of the translator who serves two masters: the foreign and the familiar”.²⁴⁵ The translator takes a vow of faithfulness to the text and lives constantly with the risk of betrayal. The risk lies in the promise and commitment of the translator to transfer the actual meaning of the text. Yet the translator is also aware that this exercise of translation involves an inevitable loss of meaning. Consequently, in the exercise of translation, the translator must be conscious of the fact that there is never a perfect translation. Yet he/she is called upon to do justice to the text’s translation.

For us, the constant dialectic interplay between faithfulness and betrayal in the exercise of translation leads to better translation. This is because while committed to the exercise of translation, the translator’s consciousness of the risk of betrayal provides the hermeneutic vigilance needed to render the appropriate transfer of meaning of the text to the other. Within this exchange, Ricoeur asserts that what is demanded is a sense of active receptivity where “the pleasure of dwelling in the other’s language is balanced by the pleasure of receiving the foreign word at home, in one’s own welcoming home”.²⁴⁶ Here, translation is seen as a way of “living with the other in order to take the other to one’s home as a guest”.²⁴⁷ It entails making room for the strange other in one’s space or receiving the other in a way that does justice to their alterity. It is against this background that we argue that religious texts are not completely untranslatable.

Since translation makes the communication of the meaning of texts possible, one can correlate Qur’anic texts on the identity and mission of Jesus with their Christian counterparts on the basis of the meanings brought to them by Islamic commentators and

²⁴³ Ibid, p5

²⁴⁴ Ibid, p14

²⁴⁵ Marianne Moyaert. *Fragile Identities*. 2011, p229

²⁴⁶ Paul Ricoeur. *On Translation*. 2006, p10

²⁴⁷ Paul Ricoeur. “Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe.” 1996, p5

Christian theologians. Whereas these scholars provide the insiders' point of view on the tradition-specific meanings of the texts concerned, it is through the comparative theological exercise that one gets to know the differences or similarities between the texts concerned. As Holland puts it, this "critical and analogical reading of texts will disclose numerous points of intersection with other texts".²⁴⁸ So, this process of textual correlation as dialogue, leads to learning from and about the other. As Moyaert puts it, here, translation means nourishing the familiar with the unknown and hence keeping the familiar alive.²⁴⁹

2.6. Conclusion

At the start of this hermeneutic discourse, we did acknowledge along with scholars like Anselm Min, Gavin D'Costa and Michael Barnes that the three traditional paradigms of interreligious dialogue are inadequate in meeting the needs of our current context of interreligious dialogue. Today, not only are we called to be attentive to the voice of the other in dialogue but dialogue also demands that we learn from what the other has to say about God. This explains why dialogue as an exercise in learning is deemed the appropriate method of interfaith engagement today.

As an exercise in learning, this form of dialogue needs a theological approach which supports the engagement between the self and the other who seek to understand and learn from each other. Here, we proposed comparative theology as that theological method. In its work of correlations, not only does comparative theology involve the crossing over to another's tradition to learn and understand texts, doctrines and practices as they pertain to their original tradition-specific contexts, it also affirms the significance of the commitment of the theologian to the home tradition. The goal here is to reach knowledge of one's tradition, authentic knowledge of the other's tradition and living together more creatively as a consequence of this learning.

Since the comparative task involves a back and forth movement between one's tradition and that of the other, comparative theology must have an adequate hermeneutic

²⁴⁸ Scott Holland. *How Do Stories Save Us?* 2006, p90

²⁴⁹ Marianne Moyaert. *Fragile Identities*. 2011, p231

understructure which is capable of properly addressing the challenges presented by dialogue as an exercise in learning. It is here that we found Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self a competent guide. Here, Ricoeur demonstrated how the narrative self is in one way or another connected to the narratives of others such that in narrating the stories of our lives, we find that others contribute to our narratives and we theirs. We argued that this understanding of narrative identity demonstrates how Jesus Christ is at once common to Christianity and Islam as historical personality and yet understood differently.

While *attestation* is the "password" to Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self, we argued that it opens up a new form of Christian-Muslim dialogue where dialogue is viewed as the sharing of mutual testimonies. Here, the dialogical context is more a statement of confidence and conviction in what one believes while being open to listen to and learn from the faith testimonies of the other. As Kaplan puts it, Ricoeur's dialogue "presupposes the ability to take the perspective of the other, learn from one another, communicate and convince each other and to reach understanding over generalizable interests".²⁵⁰ Thus, we argued that when Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology is defined by *attestation*, it is more likely to be constructive and beneficial.

Under what Ricoeur calls the ethical intention, he explains how self-esteem or self-respect transforms into solicitude or esteem/respect for others at the interpersonal level and extends to the level of institutions. We shall attend to these hermeneutic issues as the ethical and moral implications of *narrative identity*. The interest here is to see how they provide the appropriate framework for reflecting on the possible challenges posed by engaging Christians and Muslims in dialogue on Christology as an exercise in learning. This is what chapter three focuses on i.e. the ethical and moral implications of *narrative identity* for comparative theology and dialogue as an exercise in learning.

²⁵⁰ David Kaplan. *Ricoeur's Critical Theory*. 2003, p99

CHAPTER THREE

3. THE ETHICAL AND MORAL IMPLICATIONS OF NARRATIVE IDENTITY FOR CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DIALOGUE

3.1.Introduction

From the discourses in chapter two, we argued that despite the contentious nature of Christology in the light of Christian-Muslim relations, dialogue on Christology is possible. This is because though Islam and Christianity construe the identity and mission of Jesus Christ differently, Jesus still remains a common historical personality who plays distinctive roles in both religious traditions. For instance, not only is Jesus viewed as the “Word of/from Allah” in the Qur’an (Surah 3:45), but he also functions as the precursor and guarantor of the coming of the prophet Muhammad (Surah 62:6). For Christianity, Jesus does not only proclaim the Word of God, but he is the “proclaimed Word” itself. Thus, between Christianity and Islam one finds some similarities and differences in their Christological understandings. With this in mind, we argued that dialogue as an exercise in learning is the best approach for Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology today. For its theological and hermeneutic approaches, we proposed comparative theology and Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self respectively.

We also indicated that even though Ricoeur does not directly address issues relating to Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology, he nonetheless offers the hermeneutic framework which supports reflection on the challenges presented by the encounter between the self and other. Here, Ricoeur emphasized that selfhood implies otherness such that selfhood and otherness cannot be separated. While this intertwinement between the self and the other points to the possibility of interrelationship between them, fundamental to this relationship are the ethical and moral underpinnings to it. In *Oneself As Another*, Ricoeur discusses these ethical and moral implications in what is considered his “little ethics” expressed through what he calls the “ethical intention” i.e. “aiming at the good life with and for others in just institutions”.²⁵¹

²⁵¹ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p172

Ricoeur divides his “ethical intention” into three components: “the good life”, “with and for others” and “just institutions”. These three components correspond to self-esteem/self-respect, solicitude/respect for other and equality. In a context where Christology continues to pose difficult theological and doctrinal challenges which seem to impede the possibility of dialogue between Christians and Muslims, we argue that Ricoeur’s “little ethics” offers the framework for reflections on these challenges to dialogue. Not only does it bring clarity to the challenges concern, but it also offers the way forward in terms of the ethical and moral issues which support constructive engagements between the self and the other.

Hence, his hermeneutic views do not provide direct answers, so to speak, to the challenges posed by Christina-Muslim dialogue on Christology as an exercise in learning. They rather offer the framework for reflecting on these challenges in the quest to find better ways of engaging the two traditions in positive and constructive dialogues. Thus, whereas chapter two focused on the epistemological validity for engaging Christians and Muslims in dialogue on Christology, this chapter focuses on the ethical and moral implications to this engagement.

Pratt reports that from the 15th to the 18th century and beyond, “the attitude between Christianity and Islam oscillated between indifference and hostility”.²⁵² Jean-Marie Gaudeul also affirms that both Islam and Christianity at this time “shared the same planet but mentally they lived in different worlds and as time went on, the mental universe of each society grew impervious to the thinking, the values and motivations and indeed the whole mental universe of the other”.²⁵³ Here, while Christians viewed Islam as another heresy which has to be eradicated by violence, if need be; Muslims perceived Christianity as a distorted religion which lost its sense of God and truth through its alignment with western powers.²⁵⁴

²⁵² Douglas Pratt. *The Challenge of Islam*. 2005, p113

²⁵³ Jean-Marie Gaudeul. *Encounters and Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History*. 1990, p191

²⁵⁴ Pratt reports that Between Christianity and Islam at the time, one finds “evidences aplenty of enmity, of dismissive, derogatory prejudice that makes of the religious other an enemy to be fought and vanquished.” (Douglas Pratt. *The Challenge of Islam*. 2005, p117)

Though today, there are more efforts at engaging the two religions in dialogue, sufficient attention has not been directed to the problem of “dialogical attitudes”. Since Christianity and Islam hold different views about the identity and mission of Jesus Christ, the attitude that often characterizes dialogue between them is one of “claim and counterclaim” and at the end, a mutual dismissal of the other’s truth claims. Thus, some scholars propose dialogue on the ethics of Jesus as a means of avoiding these contentions. As Beaumont puts it, “since belief in the status of Jesus Christ causes disputes between Christians and Muslims, it might seem simpler to avoid dialogue on his status and discuss his teachings instead”.²⁵⁵

But does not the status of Jesus serve as the basis from which his teachings derive their authority and authenticity? Dialogue on the teachings of Jesus cannot possibly avoid his status; because the status of Jesus, for instance, grants him the authority to instruct Christians about the will of God and the human response to it. It is against this background that we argue that Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology must first begin from the status of Jesus and proceed to his teachings. This is made possible when these forms of dialogue are guided by “dialogical attitudes” that are appropriate to such contexts of dialogue. It is here that Ricoeur “little ethics” provide the appropriate framework for reflecting on what we consider as the appropriate dialogical attitudes to interreligious dialogue, namely *commitment* to one’s tradition, *openness* to and *respect* for the traditions of the other and viewing the other as an *equal-partner-in-dialogue*. Let us now turn to some aspects of Ricoeur’s “little ethics” in *Oneself As Another* and see how they provide the context for further reflections on the above dialogical attitudes.

3.2. The Ethical and Moral Dimension of Narrative Identity

From the perspective of the dialectics of *idem* and *ipse* identities, Ricoeur identifies the ethical dimension of *idem*-identity as symbolised by the phenomenon of character by which a person is identified and reidentified. *Iipse*-identity is however represented by the ethical notion of self-constancy – that manner of conducting myself so that others can count on me i.e. “because someone is counting on me, I am accountable for my actions

²⁵⁵ Mark Beaumont. *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims*. 2005, p211

before another”.²⁵⁶ Hence, between “counting on” and “being accountable for”, Ricoeur discerns the idea of responsibility which unites both terms such that in the question; “where are you?” which is posed by the other who needs me, the response, “here I am” becomes a statement of self-constancy.²⁵⁷

However, to the question: how can we bridge the gap between the narrative identity question “who am I?” and the moral identity response “here I am!” for the benefit of their living dialectics? Ricoeur’s response is: the answer “here I am!” implies that I recognize myself as a subject of imputation. So, between “the imagination that says ‘I can try anything’ and the voice that says everything is possible, but not everything is beneficial, a muted discord is sounded. It is this discord that the act of promising transforms into a fragile concordance: ‘I can try anything,’ to be sure, but ‘here is where I stand!’”²⁵⁸ This affirmative sense of the self, underscores the self-constancy implied in *ipse* identity.

We argued in chapter two that *attestation* changes dialogue from being debative, argumentative and confrontational to being the mutual sharing of testimonies. Under the category of comparative theology, we emphasized that dialogue as an exercise in learning involves crossing-over to another’s religious tradition to learn and understand texts, doctrines and practices. This act of crossing usually raises some ethical and moral questions which relate to the im/possibility of crossing religious boundaries to understand texts, doctrines and practices as they pertain to their original religious contexts, the religious allowance for such crossing and one’s response to difference. In other words, what ethical and moral principles best serve the interest of dialogue as an exercise in learning when confronted by the fact of difference in the religions? For Richard Kearney, “if ethics rightly requires me to respect the singularity of the other person, it equally requires me to recognize the other as another self... capable of recognizing me in turn as a self capable of respect and esteem”.²⁵⁹

One could say that Kearney’s view here appears to deal with the attitude of the self and the other towards each other. In Ricoeur’s “little ethics” he demonstrates the kind of

²⁵⁶ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p165

²⁵⁷ Ibid, p165

²⁵⁸ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p167-168

²⁵⁹ Richard Kearney. *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*. 2003, p80

attitudes the self and the other must have towards each other in the accomplishment of the ethical intention. For Ricoeur, self-esteem/self-respect, respect for others and equality are significant for the living out of the “good life”.²⁶⁰ As we indicated earlier, Ricoeur’s “ethical intention” does not provide direct answers to the challenges presented by the encounter between the self and the other in dialogue as an exercise in learning. They only offer the framework for reflecting on these challenges. Thus, we shall use them as the basis for reflecting on the meaning and significance of *commitment*, *openness*, *respect* and *equality* to dialogue as an exercise in learning. Let us examine their meaning through Ricoeur’s ethics of the self.

In his ethics of the self, Ricoeur attempts to justify the primacy of the Aristotelian teleological aim (the ethical aim) over the Kantian deontological moment (the moral norm). By doing so, Ricoeur develops “practical wisdom” (phronesis) as the nonsynthetic third term which helps in rendering appropriate and just judgement in the living out of the “good life” especially in morally aporetic situations. As Kaplan puts it, Ricoeur designed his “little ethics” in two axes: “the horizontal axis of moral philosophy refers to the dialogical constitution of the self in relation to others socially and politically, as friends and as citizens; the vertical axis refers to the predicates we attribute to agents and acts such as ‘good’ or ‘obligation.’”²⁶¹

By following Ricoeur’s “little ethics”, our interest is not to re-present Ricoeur’s work on how Aristotelian teleology (ethics) mediates Kantian deontology (morality), but to show how in the course of doing this, Ricoeur provides a hermeneutic framework for reflections on the meanings and significance of *commitment*, *openness*, *reciprocity* of *respect* and *equality* as “constructive dialogical attitudes”²⁶² for dialogue as an exercise in learning. In a world where there is increasing acceptance of the plurality of religions and the awareness of the potential blessings the religions could bring to human society, the goal of dialogue as the desire to live the “good life” with and for the others in just

²⁶⁰ Ricoeur’s notion of the “good life” captures Aristotle’s notion of “*eudaimonia*” which connotes “happiness,” “living well” or “human flourishing.” In Book One of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle views every action or decision as directed towards achieving something good.

²⁶¹ David Kaplan. *Ricoeur’s Critical Theory*. 2003, p101

²⁶² By “constructive dialogical attitudes”, we mean the necessary conditions which make dialogue as an exercise in learning possible.

institutions cannot be understated. Let us see how Ricoeur achieve this form of ethical self in the encounter with the other.

3.2.1. Ricoeur and the Concepts of Ethics and Morality

Unlike common practices where people use “ethics” and “morality” interchangeably, for Ricoeur it is important to draw distinctions between the two terms. Thus, whereas “ethics” defines that which is considered to be *good*, “morality” concerns that which imposes itself as *obligation*. While ethics attempts to answer the question “how should I live?” morality responds to the question “what must I do?” In this way, ethics focuses on the “aim of an accomplished life”, while morality focuses on “the articulation of this aim into norms”.²⁶³ The former is predicated on “good” or the question of “what is” while the latter predicates “obligation” or the question of “what ought to be”.²⁶⁴

In terms of the relationship between the two, Ricoeur emphasizes on the primacy of the Aristotelian teleological perspective (ethics) over the Kantian deontological point of view (morality). So, between ethics and morality, Ricoeur asserts “(1) the primacy of ethics over morality, (2) the necessity for the ethical aim to pass through the sieve of the norm and (3) the legitimacy of recourse by the norm to the aim whenever the norm leads to impasses in practice”.²⁶⁵ Morality is here perceived as a limited form of ethics since ethics encompasses morality. While being subordinate to ethics, morality is necessary for the actualization of ethics. This final recourse of morality to ethics occurs through what Ricoeur calls *Phronesis* – a form of practical wisdom geared towards the appropriate application of universal norms in particular situations.

But how is the discourse on ethics and morality linked to Ricoeur’s examination of selfhood? Ricoeur demonstrates this linkage by situating the teleological aim and the deontological moment within the predicates of “good” and “obligation” respectively. According to him, the teleological aim corresponds to “self-esteem” while the deontological moment corresponds to “self-respect”. Following the same pattern which defines the relationship between ethics and morality, Ricoeur asserted that (1) self-esteem

²⁶³ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p170

²⁶⁴ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p170

²⁶⁵ Ibid, p170

is more fundamental to the development of selfhood than self-respect, (2) self-respect is the aspect under which self-esteem appears in the domain of norms and (3) in the aporias of duty where no norm provide guidance for the exercise *hic et nunc* of respect, self-esteem becomes not only the source but recourse for self-respect.²⁶⁶ In this way, self-esteem and self-respect together represent the most advanced stages of the growth of selfhood.

For Ricoeur, therefore, it is impossible to conceive a moral self without reference to the other. To demonstrate how the ethical or moral self is connected to the other, Ricoeur traces the notion of the self with respect to itself, to others and even to anonymous third parties both on the ethical and moral planes. He then demonstrates how the autonomy of the self is “tightly bound up with solicitude for one’s neighbour and with justice for each individual”.²⁶⁷ Let us, at this point, attend to the hermeneutic issues that pertain to Ricoeur’s self and the ethical aim. Here, the focus would be on the three components of the ethical intention.

3.2.2. The Hermeneutics of the Self and the Ethical Aim

Ricoeur defines the “ethical intention” as: aiming at the “good life” with and for others, in just institutions. He finds in this definition, three essential components of the ethical intention: (1) aiming at a “good life”, (2) “with and for others”, (3) “in just institutions”. As we shall see, whereas the “good life” on its own does not directly refer to selfhood in relation to otherness, the “good life” lived “with and for others” finds itself within a dialogic structure where the self and the other meet at the interpersonal level (solicitude). However, at the level of institutions (the plurality of society) where relationships are not necessarily interpersonal, the principle of justice and equality goes beyond the limitations of solicitude to ensure justice and equality for all in social life. It is here that we find self-esteem, solicitude and equality as providing the hermeneutic framework for reflecting on *commitment, openness, respect* and the virtue of *equal-partner-in-dialogue* as necessary conditions for constructive dialogues. What follows below is a brief consideration of these ethical components.

²⁶⁶ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p171

²⁶⁷ Ibid, p18

3.2.2.1. Aiming at the “Good Life”

As we indicated earlier, Ricoeur’s notion of the “good life” also refers to what Aristotle called “living well”. For him, every action and decision is always directed towards the good; that which MacIntyre understood as internally good in-itself. A good life is that which everyone seeks to achieve because of its internal goodness i.e. those goods which are “good-in-themselves.”²⁶⁸ Hence, to say that a person is good is to think of the person in terms of virtue and a virtue is the quality a person acquires which enables him/her to achieve the internal good to practice. Here, the notion of good understood as internal good immanent to practice, gives “support for the reflexive moment of self-esteem, to the extent that it is in appraising our actions that we appraise ourselves as being their author”.²⁶⁹

On the question of life, Ricoeur considers life as denoting “the biologic rootedness of life and the unity of the person as a whole, as the person casts upon himself or herself the gaze of appraisal”.²⁷⁰ Put together, Ricoeur sees the “good life” as “the nebula of ideals and dreams of achievements with regard to which a life is held to be more or less fulfilled or unfulfilled”.²⁷¹ It is the idea of a higher finality which never ceases to be internal to human action. The “good life” is itself an ideal and a standard of excellence which sets a limit to how I should live and how we should live together.²⁷² It is the standard of excellence which provides the basis for my self-esteem. For Ricoeur, the pursuit of this higher finality (the good life) comes with the practical choices we make for ourselves.

Here, between the aim of the “good life” and the “practical choices” we make, a sort of hermeneutic circle is traced by the back-and-forth motion between the idea of the “good life” and the most important decisions we make for our existence.²⁷³ This back and forth movement is comparable to the interpretations of a text in which the whole and the parts can be understood each in terms of the other i.e. the agent who interprets the text of an action is, by so doing, also interpreting himself/herself. This “self-interpretation

²⁶⁸ David Kaplan. *Ricoeur’s Critical Theory*. 2003, p103

²⁶⁹ Ibid, p177

²⁷⁰ Ibid, p178

²⁷¹ Ibid, p179

²⁷² Kaplan. David, M. *Ricoeur’s Critical Theory*. 2003, p103

²⁷³ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p179

becomes self-esteem”²⁷⁴ in the sense that “the interpretations and choices I make about how I should live my life and attain my ideals involve an understanding of who I am and who I want to become”.²⁷⁵ So, “I am capable of evaluating my actions, assessing my goals and determining if they are good, just as I am capable of evaluating, assessing and determining if I am good”.²⁷⁶

To determine whether I am good or not is not achieved through scientific investigations because living the “good life” is internal to the self. For Ricoeur, the search for the adequation of interpretation of the character of a person “involves an exercise of judgement which, at best, can aspire to plausibility in the eyes of the other”.²⁷⁷ In other words, it is the judgement of the other which helps in determining whether I live the “good life”. This connection to the other situates “self-esteem” and the “good life” within a dialogic structure which constitutes the second component of Ricoeur’s ethical intention. But before we attend to the dialogic structure of self-esteem, let us attempt to situate this Ricoeurean understanding of self-esteem within the context of commitment as a necessary condition for dialogue as an exercise in learning.

Many religions have traditions which ensure the transmission of religious beliefs, doctrines, customs and practices from one generation to the other. While belief-systems or doctrines define the character of the “constitutive rules” which one must follow if one is to be constituted as a member of the religious community, “standards of excellence” point to the outcomes that correspond to the living out of the belief-systems of the religion. Thus, to subscribe to a particular religion (Christian or Muslim) is to acknowledge by so doing, that one believes in its doctrines and practices as capable of providing the necessary guidance to the living out of the “good life”, also understood as “life in submission to God’s will”. This explains why a considerable knowledge of a religion precedes one’s choice to belong to it. Even in the case of “infant baptism” where babies become full members of the Catholic Church through the waters of baptism, this exercise is made

²⁷⁴ Ibid, p179

²⁷⁵ David Kaplan. *Ricoeur’s Critical Theory*. 2003, p103

²⁷⁶ Ibid, p103-104

²⁷⁷ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p180

possible on the basis of the informed consent of the parents who act on behalf of their children. These children are then taught to know and live the faith as they grow.

Thus, because of the necessity of religious knowledge which serves as the basis for full allegiance, many religions turn to catechesis or religious instruction as a way of imparting religious knowledge – aware that knowledge of one’s religious tradition is the basis for one’s commitment to it. Therefore, the motivation for sticking to one’s religious tradition thus emanate from one’s esteem for that tradition as providing the necessary guidance to the living out of the “good life” or the life lived according to God’s will. This sense of esteem for one’s religion represents one’s self-confidence and self-conviction in its belief-systems as providing the necessary guidance in the living out of the “good life”. Such a realization, so to speak, informs and inspires one’s commitment to both the *idem* and *ipse*-dimensions of the tradition aware that in being faithful to God (through this tradition) amidst changes, disappointments and other contrary opinions (the *ipse*), one is following the path to a good life, a life lived in accordance to God’s will.

In this way, we could say that self-esteem or the esteem for tradition leads to one’s commitment to it. While we shall later develop commitment to the home tradition as a necessary condition for dialogue, it is essential to mention here that where religious commitment is affirmed, the best way to engage the other in dialogue is through learning. Here, the interlocutors get to know each other’s beliefs-systems and the theological frameworks which support their sense of commitment to the traditions. As we indicated earlier, *attestation* as the mutual sharing of testimonies of faith shapes and directs this form of dialogue. Even though this response to faith through commitment appears to lie in the choice of the individual believer, the believer is also aware that he/she does not live in isolation but in communion with other believers who may or may not be part of the same tradition. How then does commitment or self-esteem open up to the esteem for others in the second component of the ethical intention?

3.2.2.2. The Good life “with and For Others”

Ricoeur considers solicitude as the second component of the “ethical intention”. It defines the dialogic structure of self-esteem, expressed in the concern for the other or the desire to

live the “good life” with others. Here, the self and the other are linked to such an extent that one cannot be reflected upon without reference to the other.²⁷⁸ As we shall see, when taken in its symmetrical form, solicitude emerges as a kind of Aristotelian friendship which expresses the mutual and reciprocal relationship between the self and the other. However, when taken in its asymmetrical form as in the Levinasian sense of the infinite other who summons me to responsibility without reciprocity, solicitude emerges as “benevolent spontaneity” or a sympathy which is expressed by the desire to understand and experience the world as the other sees it.

But how do we tease out a dialogic structure of self-esteem when we know that the reflexivity of self-esteem carries with it the danger of turning in upon oneself or closing up on openness? In other words, how does the reflexivity of self-esteem connect with solicitude which expresses the reciprocity of openness and concern for the other? In response, Ricoeur asserts that “solicitude is not something added on to self-esteem from the outside, but it unfolds the dialogic dimension of self-esteem, which up to now has been passed-over in silence”.²⁷⁹ To justify this claim, Ricoeur turns attention to Aristotle’s analysis of friendship in order to demonstrate how the self is dialogically constituted and why we need each other to be able to live the “good life”.

Aristotle understands friendship as “a mutual reciprocal relationship that is the highest good towards which life and actions and therefore happiness and pleasure, are oriented”.²⁸⁰ Friendship is based on self-love a form of refined egotism (*philautia*) because one cares for one’s friend for the same reason that one cares for oneself. Two premises are drawn here in the way egotism (self-love) is mediated by friendship. The first is that friendship is essentially equivocal and can only be clarified by recourse to its true object i.e. *philēta* (love).²⁸¹ Here, Aristotle says that there are three objects of love: the good, the

²⁷⁸ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p180

²⁷⁹ Ibid, p180

²⁸⁰ David Kaplan. *Ricoeur’s Critical Theory*. 2003, p204

²⁸¹ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p182

pleasant and the useful; and these three objects correspond to three forms of friendship (friendship of utility, of pleasure and the good).²⁸²

The second premise is that “regardless of the place of philautia (self-love) in the genesis of friendship, the latter presents itself from the outset as a mutual relationship”.²⁸³ Here, reciprocity is part of its content because it extends to the commonality of “living together” or in mutual intimacy. This sense of mutuality has its own requirements which are different from those eclipsed by the Husserlian notion of the same and the Levinasian notion of the infinite other. In this form of mutuality “each loves the other as being the man he is”,²⁸⁴ which is different from friendship based on utility and on pleasure. “As being” here expresses the sense of being as the other is. “As being” here averts any egoistic leanings by its mutual constitutivity. In this way “the reflexivity of oneself is not abolished but is, as it were, split into two by mutuality”.²⁸⁵

Thus, Ricoeur retains from Aristotle an ethics of reciprocity, sharing and living together whereby friendship adds reciprocity/mutuality to self-esteem. For Ricoeur, “the friend inasmuch as he is the other self of oneself, has the other role of providing what one is incapable of procuring for oneself”.²⁸⁶ So, whereas self-esteem is the primordial reflexive moment of the aim of the good life, friendship makes a contribution to self-esteem without taking anything away. It introduces the idea of reciprocity in the exchange between human beings who both esteem each other.

In contrast to this Aristotelian concept of friendship is the Levinasian notion of the command of the face of the other who establishes asymmetry with the self. If solicitude and reciprocity apply to someone who is a friend to me, then what about someone who is not a friend to me; how does solicitude apply in asymmetrical relations? As we saw earlier in chapter two, Levinas asserts that the other summons me to responsibility without reciprocity because the other is exterior to me, separate from me and unequal to me.

²⁸² These forms of friendships are: “friendship of utility” (friendship between me and someone who is useful to me in some way), “friendship of pleasure” (friendship between me and someone whose company I enjoy) and “friendship of the good” (friendship based on mutual respect)

²⁸³ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p183

²⁸⁴ Ibid, p183

²⁸⁵ Ibid, p183

²⁸⁶ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p185

Following Levinas, Ricoeur uses this notion of the dissymmetrical other to demonstrate how a new sense of solicitude is established through benevolent spontaneity²⁸⁷ which is intimately connected to self-esteem.

Whereas the Aristotelian sense of friendship is structured on the basis of giving and receiving, on the basis of benevolent spontaneity, Ricoeur asserts that receiving is placed on an equal footing with the summons to responsibility where the self recognizes the superiority of the other who enjoins him/her to act in accordance with justice.²⁸⁸ This “equal footing” is not the same as that of friendship in which giving and receiving are well balanced. Rather, “it compensates for the initial dissymmetry resulting from the primacy of the other in the situation of instruction, through the reverse movement of recognition”.²⁸⁹ Here, the other’s inability to reciprocate is viewed as *suffering*.

Suffering here is not the same as physical or mental pain, but a reduction in the other’s capacity for acting or being-unable-to-act. The other’s incapacity to act is seen as a violation of its integrity because we are by nature created with the capacity to give and to receive. With the Levinasian other, the full capacity to act only resides in the self who gives his sympathy and his compassion by sharing in the pain of the other who lacks the capacity to give. Because the Levinasian other is reduced to the condition of only receiving without being-able-to give, the self is assigned the responsibility of caring for the other by giving without expecting. As a mark of true sympathy, “the self whose power of acting is greater than its other, finds itself affected by all that the suffering other offers to it in return. From the suffering other comes a giving that is no longer drawn from the power of acting and existing, but precisely from weakness itself”.²⁹⁰ For Ricoeur, the supreme test of solicitude can be located in this act of giving without receiving. It is here that one finds a virtuous friend.²⁹¹

Ricoeur concluded this second component by emphasizing that I cannot have self-esteem unless I esteem others as myself. “As myself” means that “you too are capable of

²⁸⁷ Ibid, p188

²⁸⁸ Ibid, p190

²⁸⁹ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p190

²⁹⁰ Ibid p191

²⁹¹ Ibid, p191

starting something in the world, of acting for a reason, of hierarchizing your priorities, of evaluating the ends of your actions and, having done this, of holding yourself in esteem as I hold myself in esteem".²⁹² Consequently, in the equivalence between the "you too" and the "as myself" lies a trust that is held as an extension of the *attestation* that I can do something and therefore have worth. This equivalence expresses "the esteem of the other as oneself and the esteem of oneself as an other".²⁹³ How does this dialogical sense of the self apply in an interreligious dialogue context?

We indicated earlier that one's esteem for a particular religion is first of all preceded by one's knowledge and conviction in its ability to provide guidance for the living out of the "good life". This knowledge and conviction becomes the basis for the establishment of one's commitment to a particular religion. But this living out of the "good life" is not done in isolation but in community with other believers who also share similar convictions and commitments to the religion, albeit the degree. Hence, we can talk of the Christian community or the Muslim Ummah (the Islamic community). Take for instance the Muslim Ummah in the light of the individual's relationships to it. Here, the individual Muslim is first related to his immediate family, then his/her relatives and finally to other Muslims in the bond of religious brotherhood understood as the Muslim Ummah.

To this horizontal axis of relationships is also added the vertical axis which concerns the believer's submission to the will of Allah. It is this vertical axis which gives meaning to the Muslim Ummah. In other words, the basis of the Islamic community is not that of a common forefather but that of a common God (Allah), a common Book (the Qur'an) and a common prophet (Muhammad). Consequently, the desire to live the "good life" understood as "life in total submission to the will of Allah" is the reason for the Ummah; as the Qur'an says "Indeed, all the believers are brothers" (Surah 49:10). In this sense, while the believer is personally responsible for his/her level of commitment to Allah through the religion of Islam, the believer also knows that he/she needs the support of other Muslims (the community) and vice versa to be able to live the "good life". It is here

²⁹² Ibid, p193

²⁹³ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p194

that the dialogic structure of self-esteem, also understood as religious commitment, fleshes out as solicitude.

Taken in its interreligious dialogue context, solicitude also expresses the concern religious communities give to each in the living out of their respective notions of the “good life”. For instance, in a cosmopolitan context, the Muslim Ummah may live in close proximity with other religious communities such as Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism. If these different communities are to be able to live out their respective notions of the “good life”, they must show concern for each other through respect, friendship and mutual co-existence. This form of mutuality and friendship captures the sense of what Ricoeur considered as esteeming the other as I esteem myself. It is establishing a kind of solicitude with the other, a mutual friendship which is developed out of the understanding that we must show respect to the other who desires to live the “good life”, a respect which is in itself part of living the good life with and for others. In other words, I cannot expect to have my self-esteem/respect honoured by others unless I esteem others as myself.²⁹⁴ Interreligious dialogue as an exercise in learning is defined by this willingness to “give” and “receive” in mutual friendship and respect. While we shall later develop respect as a necessary condition for dialogue as an exercise in learning, let us examine how Ricoeur presents the principle of equality as the corollary of reciprocity where friendship is placed on the path of justice and where the life lived together at the interpersonal level gives way to the life lived beyond the interpersonal.

3.2.2.3.The Good life with and for others “in Just Institutions”

According to Ricoeur, aiming at “the good life with and for others” extends beyond interpersonal relationship to include anonymous others in the wider society. So, while solicitude is that which mediates the ethical intention within interpersonal relationships, in the plurality of human society where there are anonymous third parties, the ethical intention is mediated by just institutions. Justice serves the ethical intention at this level and it produces ethical features like equality, which is not contained in solicitude. In other words, though there is an interpersonal dimension of a “good life” through solicitude, to

²⁹⁴ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p193

achieve a “good life” at the societal level we need institutions which would serve our sense of justice through the obligations they impose and the privileges and opportunities they provide to members of the community.

But what is an institution? For Ricoeur, an “institution” connotes the structure of living together as a historical community – a people, a nation or even a religion.²⁹⁵ It defines, as Kaplan puts it, “the structures of living together and belonging to a particular community united by the bond of common mores”.²⁹⁶ According to Ricoeur, human society is basically plural, consisting of people who do not necessarily know each other and may not have interpersonal relations. In this plurality, one meets the anonymous other – someone I may meet and greet occasionally but whom I do not intimately know. It also includes those whom I may never meet face-to-face. As Ricoeur puts it, this “plurality includes third parties who will never be faces”.²⁹⁷ Thus, the plea for this anonymous other is included in the fullest aim of the true life, the “good life”. If institutions serve to regulate this state of plurality in human society, then what does it mean to be just to these anonymous others in society? And what does it mean to be treated justly by them in return?

By virtue of their common mores, institutions are rule-governed and they regulate the interactions and activities of the anonymous others through their own standards of excellence which embody the corporate aspects of the good life.²⁹⁸ So, in the idea of “everyone” which is characteristic of social institutions, it is the virtue of justice (fairness) which ensures the “good life” for everyone. Social institutions ensure this “sense of justice” for everyone through the principle of equality. Justice for Ricoeur is “the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought”.”²⁹⁹

According to Ricoeur, this sense of Justice points to two directions: (1) the good in respect to the institutional mediation of the desire to live the “good life” together in society

²⁹⁵ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p194

²⁹⁶ David Kaplan. *Ricoeur's Critical Theory*. 2003, p105

²⁹⁷ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p195

²⁹⁸ David Kaplan. *Ricoeur's Critical Theory*. 2003, p105

²⁹⁹ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p197

and (2) the legal where the judicial system confers upon the law the right of constraint.³⁰⁰ Here, Ricoeur focuses attention on the first direction because the idea of justice was, first of all, not constructed from legal systems in the beginning but emerged out of the mythical mold of Greek tragedy. Secondly, the “sense of justice” is not merely limited to the legal sphere but is at play in human relationships such that the “sense of injustice” is more poignant and perspicacious than the “sense of justice”, because “people have a clearer vision of what is missing in human relations than of the right way to organize it. This is why, even for philosophers, it is injustice that first set thought in motion ”.³⁰¹

In human society, the “sense of injustice” expressed in forms of inequality is checked by just institutions. Institutions achieve this through the principle of distributive justice³⁰² which “governs the appointment of roles, tasks, advantages and disadvantages between the members of the society”³⁰³ through the principle of equality whose direct opposite is inequality. Here, the unjust man is considered to be one who takes too much in terms of advantage or not enough in terms of burdens. The intermediate between “taking too much” and “taking less” is proportional equality which defines the sense of distributive justice “regulating what is fair to each one as anonymous members of the society ”.³⁰⁴

In consequence, Ricoeur asserts that “distributive justice consists in equalizing two relations between, in each case, a person and merit ”.³⁰⁵ This distributive interpretation of institutions contributes to tearing down the walls that separate the individual from the society and assures the cohesion between the three components of the ethical aim i.e. the individual, the interpersonal and the societal.³⁰⁶ Thus, while solicitude provides to the self, another who is a face in the strong Levinasian sense, equality provides to the self another who is the plurality of many others. As a result, the sense of justice takes nothing away

³⁰⁰ Ibid, p197

³⁰¹ Ibid, p198

³⁰² Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p199

³⁰³ Ibid, p200

³⁰⁴ David Kaplan. *Ricoeur's Critical Theory*. 2003, p106

³⁰⁵ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p201

³⁰⁶ Ibid, p201

from solicitude but presupposes it to the extent that it adds to solicitude the field of application which extends beyond interpersonal relationships.³⁰⁷

From a dialogical perspective, it is well known that Christianity and Islam are two major religious institutions. But Ricoeur's discourse on just institutions focuses on the particularity of the institution and its response to issues of justice and equality for the plurality of others who are nonetheless bonded together by common mores. His discourse, therefore, concerns what happens between members of an institution who are tied together by common mores and not about the relationships between institutions. Thus, one might ask: how can this form of intra-institutional hermeneutic discourse be applied to an inter-institutional context? In response, what follows below is an attempt to show how Ricoeur's discourse on just institutions apply individually to Islam and Christianity as religious institutions on the one hand and how elements in this discourse provide the framework for reflecting on principle of equality as a necessary condition for inter-institutional relations.

As different institutions, Christianity and Islam have different traditions and doctrines which give meaning to the notion of the "good life" and the practice of it. For instance, for Islam: while theology must be informed by the Five Pillars of the religion with particular focus on the unicity and transcendence of Allah (*Tawhid*), the daily living out of the "good life" is liturgically expressed in the believers commitment to confessing the Shahada and saying the five daily prayers (the *Salat*) amidst other practices. Thus, the confession of the Shahada and the commitment to the five daily prayers stand as a hub on which the believer's daily living out of the "good life" revolves. Unlike Islam, Christian theology revolves around the understanding of God as Trinity, where the believer is daily called upon to submit himself to God the Father, through the message of Jesus Christ with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This message of Jesus Christ is summarised in the "love of God and the love of neighbour".

Consequently, between Christianity and Islam one finds two religious institutions who at once share similar theological concepts such as God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, but whose theological constructions of these realities differ substantially in the light

³⁰⁷ Ibid, p202

of the *Tawhid* (Islam) and the Holy Trinity (Christianity). While these two theological foundations will be taken up and elucidated upon in chapters four and five, it is sufficient to state here that the *Tawhid* and the Holy Trinity show that Christianity and Islam are different religious systems of belief.

As systems, their respective doctrines and practices constitute the common mores which bind their respective adherents together. If we understand the essence of institutions as safeguarding the individual and collective needs of its members, then Islam and Christianity are two separate institutions which fundamentally exist to give guidance to Muslims and Christians in the living out of the “good life”. This task of the two institutions first of all, needs to be recognised when engaging in dialogue as an exercise in learning. Secondly, just as institutions also exist to promote the sense of justice through the principle of equality, so also one can apply this principle of equality to religions which recognize each other as different institutions with unique traditions and theologies. The realization that each institution is unique and different in its tradition and theology goes to support the claim that one’s system of belief cannot be used as the standard of measurement for the truthfulness of the other. If Islam and Christianity are to engage in dialogue on Christology as an exercise in learning, then this dialogue needs to be constructed against the background of what the other has to say about Jesus Christ within their tradition-specific contexts.

If I recognize that the other has something unique to share about Jesus Christ from which I desire to learn, then this other cannot be considered as inferior to me but as an equal partner in dialogue – one who learns from me and from whom I learn. Since each religion has its unique Christology which is independent of the Christologies of the other, justice is served when the other is recognized as an equal partner – an original source of self-understanding, capable of communicating a unique experience.³⁰⁸ This sense of equality opens up the dialogical process for the experiences of the other as an equal partner. As Gadamer puts it, the thou here must be seen truly as a thou – “not to overlook his claims, but to let him truly say something to us. Without such openness to one another,

³⁰⁸ Panikkar, Raimon. *The Cosmotheandric Experience*. 1993, p60

there is no genuine human bond”.³⁰⁹ As this sense of equality pertains to the plurality of others in social institutions, so does it also apply to the plurality of religions – each religious institution always emerges as that “anonymous face” whose plea for justice resides in the respect and equal recognition they deserve.

If self-esteem expresses itself in the form of the commitment of oneself to his/her religious tradition, then solicitude opens up the dialogic structure of self-esteem, inspiring the desire to want to live the good life with and for others at the level of interpersonal relations. However, at the level of inter-institutional dialogue, what is demanded is the sense of justice expressed as equal respect and recognition for the other who also possesses authentic, independent and unique theologies about God. It is this uniqueness of theology and faith-experience which becomes the subject of interreligious learning. Having said this, how does Ricoeur relate the above tripartite structure of the ethical intention to the moral norm as its subordination and completion?

3.2.3. Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics of the Self and the Moral Norm

At the beginning of the discourse on ethics, Ricoeur asserted the following: (1) the primacy of ethics over morality, (2) the necessity for the ethical aim to be mediated by the moral norm, (3) the recourse morality must take in ethics to resolve conflicts and aporias. Under the plane of morality, Ricoeur shows how it is necessary to subject the ethical aim to the test of the norm. Here, our interest is to show how Ricoeur’s discourse on morality provides further clarity to our reflections on the values of commitment, openness, respect for the other and equality as necessary conditions for dialogue as an exercise in learning.

Following the same tripartite structure of the ethical aim Ricoeur, first of all, subjects the aim of the “good life” to the test of the norm without recourse to the dialogic structure of the norm. This then leads us to the consideration of the moral norm in the light of solicitude which denotes the primordial relation of the self to the other at the ethical level. With just institutions, the sense of justice (ethics) is replaced by the rule of justice under the category of the moral norm³¹⁰ Here, self-respect from the moral plane answers to

³⁰⁹ Hans Georg Gadamer. *Truth and Method*. 1989, p358-383, 361

³¹⁰ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p203

self-esteem from the ethical plane, reaching its full meaning where respect for the norm (first stage), blossoms into respect for others and for (second stage). This further extends to respect for everyone with the right to a just share in an equitable distribution (third stage).

Ricoeur parallels the tripartite structure of the ethical intention with the moral norm reflected in the three formulations of the Kantian Categorical Imperatives.³¹¹ In this way, the teleological aim towards the good life first of all “corresponds to the principle of universality, in which the agent achieves freedom under self-imposed laws”.³¹² Secondly, solicitude also “corresponds to the formula of ‘end in itself’ in which we are bound to respect others as ends and not as mere means”.³¹³ Thirdly, living in just institutions “corresponds to the obligation to pursue the ‘kingdom of ends’ in which we must act in maxims that will generate a community of free and equal members, each of whom will further the aims of others while realising his own intentions”.³¹⁴

So, one notices here that self-respect in the moral plane has the same structure as self-esteem under the reign of ethics. However, the relationship between ethics and morality according to Ricoeur is not one of parallelism, but complementarity because the ethical aim has to pass through the sieve of the moral norm in order to find its completion. In other words, whereas the good is prior to the right, the good requires the right in order to achieve the full sense of the good life which entails living well, with and for the other, in just institutions.³¹⁵ Let us delve into these different aspects of the moral norm.

3.2.3.1. The Autonomy of the Will

Under this first component, Ricoeur examines the self’s relation to the norm by isolating the moment of universality in which the norm tests the wish to live the good life. Here, the

³¹¹ Kant presents four formulations of the *categorical imperative*: (1) *The Universal Law of Nature Formula* – “Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.” (2) *The Humanity Formula* – “Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.” (3) *The Autonomy Formula* – “So act that your will can regard itself at the same time as making universal law through its maxims.” (4) *The Kingdom of Ends Formula* – “So act as if you were through your maxims a law-making member of a kingdom of ends.”

³¹² David Kaplan. *Ricoeur’s Critical Theory*. 2003, p106

³¹³ Ibid, p106

³¹⁴ Ibid, p106

³¹⁵ Ibid, p106

self is examined outside the dialogic moment of the norm. Ricoeur recognizes this turn as pure abstraction because there are no norms which do not take persons into account. However, by embarking on this course of abstraction, he hopes to demonstrate how through the same universality the self draws its authority from the reflexive plane. Ricoeur anchors the deontological moment on the Kantian concept of the “unconditional good will” expressed in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Here, Kant asserts that “it is impossible to conceive anything in the world or even outside of it, which can be taken as good without qualification, except the good will”.³¹⁶

In this Kantian “good-will”, that which receives the predicate ‘good’ is the *will*. Here, the *will* takes the place of desire which is at the heart of Aristotelian ethics. In other words, while desire is recognised through its aim, the will is recognised through its relation to the norm because the *will* responds to “the question ‘what ought I to do?’”³¹⁷ According to Ricoeur, Kant therefore sees the will as self-legislating and acting in response to the duty of obligation. Here, “the morality of obligation is tied to the universality of the will, characterized by the constraint which one imposes on oneself”.³¹⁸ As Kaplan puts it, “a free individual acts under self-imposed laws, according to which each person freely submits to self-discipline”.³¹⁹ This form of self-legislation is what Ricoeur refers to as autonomy. Under autonomy, the self finds support for its moral status without any support from the other. Here, Kant invests in the same subject the power of commanding and obeying.

In chapter two under the category of *idem*-identity, we indicated that the *idem* aspects of the identity of the religious other consists of their doctrines, Scriptures, religious practices, rites and customs. These represent that which is given to all adherents of the religion. However, the *ipse* aspect of the identity of the believer consists in keeping one’s promise. As Ricoeur puts it, a person’s commitment to what he/she promises even in the face of danger, disappointments, uncertainties and new opportunities demonstrates that the

³¹⁶ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p205

³¹⁷ Ibid, p206

³¹⁸ Ibid, p206

³¹⁹ David Kaplan. *Ricoeur’s Critical Theory*. 2003, p107

person is reliable and can be counted on.³²⁰ Consequently, on the level of religious beliefs, though by becoming a member of a religious community, one receives the systems of belief held by the community (*idem* identity); the living out of these belief-systems depends on the adherent's commitment.

Religious commitment cannot therefore be forced otherwise it runs the risk of being superficial and pretentious. It has an "internal" quality which emanates from the personal volition of the individual, measured by the adherent's willingness and readiness to remain faithful to the *idem* aspects of the religion in all circumstances. Even though the object of one's commitment is external (dealing with doctrines, customs and practices), the act of commitment always finds its roots in the personal decision of the adherent. Thus, under the category of ethics we indicated that while religious commitment is, first of all, preceded by one's knowledge of and conviction in its doctrines as providing the necessary guidance in the living out of the "good life", under the plane of morality, commitment is sustained by the will to remain faithful to the traditions that give rise to these convictions.

However, as abstract as this first component of the triadic structure seem to be, Ricoeur indicates that its significance lies in how it serves as the basis for a progressive movement from the general formulation of Kant's categorical imperative to its second and third formulations. These formulations would serve as guide to the second and third component of the triadic structure. What is therefore significant to note here is that just as the autonomy of the will is the foundation from which the other two Kantian imperatives are formulated, so also is the notion of religious commitment – it serves as the basis from which the virtues of openness, respect for others and equality are derived. Let us now consider these other components.

3.2.3.2. Solicitude and Respect for others

Ricoeur asserted, under the category of ethics that solicitude is not something added on to self-esteem but it unfolds the dialogic structure of self-esteem. So also under the category of the moral norm the respect owed to persons does not constitute a heterogeneous moral principle in relation to the autonomy of the self, but constitutes its intrinsic dialogic

³²⁰ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p124

structure on the plane of the obligation of rules.³²¹ Ricoeur justifies this thesis in two phases: in the first phase, he demonstrates how the norm of respect owed to persons is intimately connected to solicitude. He then justifies the claim that “the respect owed to persons on the moral plane, is in the same relation to autonomy as solicitude is to the aim of the good life on the ethical plane”.³²² In the second phase, Ricoeur argues that “the respect owed to persons posited in the second Categorical imperative is on the moral plane, in the same relation to autonomy as solicitude was to the aim of the good life in the ethical plane”.³²³ Let us now consider these phases according Ricoeur’s line of thought.

In attending to the first phase where he shows the link by which the norm of respect owed to persons is connected to the dialogic structure of the ethical aim (solicitude), Ricoeur relies on the Golden Rule³²⁴ as the appropriate transitional formula between solicitude and the second Kantian imperative: “Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end” (Gr. 66-67/429). According to Ricoeur, interpersonal relationship can sometimes be the occasion of violence which resides in the power one exerts over another. Here, he takes pain to differentiate between the expressions: *power-over*, *power-to-do* and *power-in-common*. While “power-to-do” expresses the capacity possessed by an agent to constitute himself/herself as the author of an action, “power-in-common” defines “the capacity for members of a historical community to exercise in an indivisible manner, their desire to live together”.³²⁵

However, “power-over” which relates to what one does to another is held to be the occasion for the evil of violence. For instance, “from the domain of physical violence considered as the abusive use of force against others, the figure of evil begins with the simple use of threat, passing through the degrees of constraints and ending in murder”.³²⁶ The end result is the destruction of the power-to-do of others and hence, the destruction of self-esteem and self-respect. Consequently, moral norms come as a response to issues of

³²¹ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p218

³²² Ibid, p218

³²³ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p222

³²⁴ “Treat others as you would want them to treat you (Lk 6:31)” (Ibid, p219)

³²⁵ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p220

³²⁶ Ibid, p220

violence. For instance, the values of truth, property and life are preserved from violations in the prohibition: “you shall not lie, you shall not steal, you shall not kill, you shall not torture”.³²⁷ So, while solicitude affirms the mutual exchange of self-esteem at the ethical level, this affirmation is seen as the hidden soul of prohibition on the moral plane where one rejects the indignities inflicted on others through solicitude. The fact that there is a possibility of the spectre of evil in the choices we make suggests that there is always the need to subject the desire to live the good life to the test of the moral norm.

The second phase of Ricoeur’s discourse on solicitude and the norm centres on the claim that the respect owed to persons posited in the second formulation of the Kantian imperative, is on the moral plane in the same relation to autonomy as solicitude was to the aim of the “good life” on the ethical plane. According to Ricoeur, whereas the link between “solicitude” and the “good life” occurred after a genuine leap on the ethical plane, things are much different with Kant because the second formulation of the categorical imperative (act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end) is here treated as the development of the general form of the imperative.

This Kantian imperative reveals two terms which live in dialectic tension i.e. the idea of humanity and that of a person as an end in himself. Humanity as a singular term appears to be an abstract universality which governs the principle of autonomy without the consideration of persons. The idea of persons “as ends in themselves however demand that one takes into account the plurality of persons, without allowing one to take this idea as far as the conception of otherness”.³²⁸ Here, Kant gives priority to the continuity assured by the idea of humanity with the principle of autonomy, over the discontinuity which defines the sudden introduction of the notion of end-in-itself and the notion of persons as ends-in-themselves.³²⁹ So, the idea of humanity which is not to be understood as the sum totality of human beings but as the basis from which one is worthy of respect, suggests a sense of universality which is taken from the perspective of the multiplicity of persons which Kant

³²⁷ Ibid, p221

³²⁸ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p222

³²⁹ Ibid, p222

called “object or matter”.³³⁰ Thus for Kant, humanity acts as a screen in the direct confrontation between oneself and another. It is within this context that “the notion of person as an end in itself comes to balance that of humanity, to the extent that it introduces in the very formulation of the imperative, the distinction between ‘your person’ and ‘the person of anyone else.’”³³¹ In this way, the maxim then maintains that never treat humanity simply as a means.

But what does it mean to treat humanity in a person as a means? For Ricoeur, it is to exert upon the will of others that power which, full of restraint in the case of influence, is unleashed in all the forms which violence takes culminating in torture.³³² However, persons as rational beings must be considered as ends-in-themselves and “not merely as means for the arbitrary use of this or that will”.³³³ Thus, every man’s actions, whether directed to himself or to other rational beings, must always be viewed at the same time as an end. The basis for this form of respect lies in the fact that the consciousness of autonomy implies the “fact of reason” and the fact of reason implies the existence of morality and “morality exists because the person himself exists”.³³⁴ Thus, “the Golden Rule and the imperative of respect owed to persons do not simply have the same field of exercise, [but] they also have the same aim: to establish reciprocity wherever there is a lack of reciprocity”.³³⁵ According to Ricoeur, they constitute that which “ultimately arms our indignation, that is, our rejection of indignities inflicted on others”.³³⁶

From this second component of the moral norm, two things remain significant for Ricoeur and also for our interreligious dialogue context. While it underscores the dialogic structure which underlies the autonomy of the self/will (where self-respect leads to the respect for other), it also emphasizes that within this dialogic structure the respect for others must be devoid of any violation of their dignity and integrity. It must be directed towards a sense of respect for who they are and what they are. In other words, this view of

³³⁰ Ibid, p223

³³¹ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p224

³³² Ibid, p225

³³³ Ibid, p225

³³⁴ Ibid, p225

³³⁵ Ibid, p225

³³⁶ Ibid, p221

respect does not only capture the sense of respect as it pertains to the Golden Rule, but it also goes even deeper than that to imply that even in situations where one does not treat himself/herself with respect the other must still be respected as an end-in-himself.

3.2.3.3. The Principles of Equality and Justice

For Ricoeur, just as solicitude on the ethical plane corresponds to the Categorical Formula of ends-in-themselves whereby we are bound to respect others not as means but as ends in themselves, so also, the sense of justice at the ethical plane corresponds to the rule of justice at the moral plane where “living in just institutions corresponds to the obligation of pursuing the kingdom of end, in which we must act on a maxim that will generate a community of free and equal members, each of whom would further the aims of others while realizing his own intentions”.³³⁷ Thus, just as we deliberated upon the sense of equality at the ethical plane, so also at the moral plane the focus is on the principle of equality which occurs at the level of the principle of justice.

At the moral plane, the principle of justice ensures the application of equality to everyone within the community. Here, a formal principle of justice is necessary to ensure this application of equality. To achieve this end, Ricoeur turns to John Rawls’ conception of procedural justice. In his *Theory of Justice*, Rawls uses the concept of “fairness” as the key to his notion of justice because he views *fairness* as the basis from which the justice basic to institutions emanates. Here, Rawls tries to shake off and free his procedural conception of justice from the tutelage of the good defined by the teleological aim, especially its utilitarian version of the notion of justice³³⁸ whereby the simple pleasure of the individual is sacrificed for the benefit of the greater pleasure of the community.

Rawls nonetheless shares Kant’s conviction that when the individual’s pleasure is sacrificed for the greater good, it means that the individual is being used as a means to an end and not as an end in himself. Thus, his entire work on the *Theory of Justice* is a shift from the question of foundation to mutual consent. Here, Rawls presents his work on justice as a response to three basic questions on the fairness of deliberation: (1) what would

³³⁷ David Kaplan. *Ricoeur’s Critical Theory*. 2003, p106

³³⁸ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p230.

guarantee the fairness of the situation of deliberation from which an agreement could result concerning the just arrangement of institution? (2) What principle will be chosen in this fictive situation of deliberation? (3) What arguments could convince the deliberating parties to choose the Rawlsian principle of justice rather than utilitarianism?³³⁹

According to Rawls, we are all self-interested rational beings and therefore we need to stand behind the veil of ignorance.³⁴⁰ By “self-interested rational beings”, Rawls means that we are motivated to select in an informed and rational way, that which seems to favour us. Thus, a self-interested rational person behind the veil of ignorance would not want to belong to a social class, a race or a nationality that has been discriminated against. For him, all generations under the veil of ignorance are seen to have the same equal rights to resources both now and in the future. What Rawls seek to preserve here is the equality that each person deserves. Hence, he draws up a list of constraints which the individual must know so that the choices they make would depend on a system of distribution of advantages and disadvantages.

These constraints are: (1) parties in deliberation must have sufficient knowledge of the general psychology of human nature (its fundamental passions and motivations). (2) The parties must know what every normal human being wishes to possess (i.e. the primary social goods which make the exercise of freedom possible). (3) Since the choice is between many competing systems of justice, every party must have sufficient knowledge about the competing systems. (4) All the parties must have equal information about the issues concerned; (5) the contract they make must be thereupon stable regardless of the prevailing circumstances.³⁴¹ Thus, for Rawls the above constraints would guarantee the fairness of the situation of deliberation from which an agreement could result concerning the just arrangement of institution.³⁴²

To the second question: “what principle will be chosen in the fictive situation of deliberation?” Rawls presents two principles of justice and by so doing, he demonstrates

³³⁹ Ibid, p231

³⁴⁰ To say that we stand behind “the veil of ignorance” is to assume that we do not know the following sort of things about ourselves: our gender, parents, social class, race, nationality, generation and so on (see John Rawls. *The Theory of Justice*. 1971, p12)

³⁴¹ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p232

³⁴² Ibid, p232

their correct placement. For Rawls, self-interested rational human beings behind the veil of ignorance would under normal circumstances, choose two general principles of justice to structure society: the first being the *principle of equal liberty* and the second the *difference principle*. While the first is more egalitarian – demonstrating that all persons have equal rights to liberty in society, the second principle stipulates that social and economic inequality should be carefully arranged so that they are directed (1) to the greatest benefits of the disadvantaged in society and (2) that they ensure equal opportunity for all in the society in terms of holding offices and positions.

Here, justice as distribution is “extended to all kinds of advantages capable of being treated as shares to be distributed: rights and duties on the one hand and benefits and burdens on the other”.³⁴³ Their purpose is to ensure the establishment of fairness in all segments of society. According to Rawls, just as the content of these principles remains very significant, “so also the rule of priority that ties them together”.³⁴⁴ This priority follows a serial or lexical order which signifies that ““a departure from the institution of equal liberty required by the first principle cannot be justified... by greater social and economic advantages””³⁴⁵ To put it simply, Rawls’ emphasis is that the interest of the individual should never be sacrificed for the benefit of the common good. In other words, society must always be attentive to both the individual’s needs and the needs of the wider community.

In response to the third question (where the deliberating parties would choose the Rawlsian principle of justice against that of utilitarianism), Rawls relies on what he calls the *maximin* which is a decision theory in the context of uncertainty where parties are required “to choose the arrangements that maximize the minimum shares”.³⁴⁶ Situated within the original context of the veil of ignorance where no one knows where his place in society is and therefore reasons on the basis of mere possibilities, the contracting parties become committed to each other on the basis of the terms of the contract which are publicly defined and unanimously accepted. In this way, “if two conceptions of justice are

³⁴³ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p233

³⁴⁴ Ibid, p235

³⁴⁵ Ibid, p245

³⁴⁶ Ibid, p236

in conflict and if one of them makes possible a situation that someone would find unacceptable, whereas the other would exclude this possibility, then the second conception would prevail”.³⁴⁷ Like Kant, the value of Rawls’ contractarianism makes it impossible to adopt rules to the advantage of some at the expense of others. “It also prohibits forms of treatment that no one would want for themselves”.³⁴⁸

Having followed Rawls in response to the three questions on the principle of justice, Ricoeur then asked: does Rawls’ pure procedural conception of justice break all ties with the sense of justice that precedes it and follows it all along? In Ricoeur’s view, the procedural conception of justice, at best, formalises the sense of justice that it never ceases to presuppose.³⁴⁹ As it were, Rawls himself even admitted that the argument of the procedural conception of justice rests upon a preunderstanding of what justice and injustice are. It is the meanings derived from these concepts which permit us to define and interpret these two principles of justice before considering them as the chosen principles in the original situation behind the veil of ignorance.³⁵⁰ What is however noteworthy in the Rawlsian contractualist theory is that just like Kant, Rawls’ contractualism also makes it impossible to adopt rules which are discriminatory. However, what is the dialogical relevance of these ethico-moral components of aiming at the good life with and for other in just institutions?

We indicated earlier that the basis for the individual’s faith response to Christianity or Islam emanates from one’s esteem for the religion as providing the necessary guidance to the living out of the “good life”. However, the “life lived in obedience to God” is not done in isolation. It also encompasses a relationship with others (solicitude) who equally aspire to live the “good life”. It is this form of relationship which gives rise to the formation of Christian or Muslim communities. In the wider society, Christians and Muslims know that they are not communities living in isolation but share sometimes the same space, streets, facilities and amenities with other religious communities. In other words, many societies today are multi-faith and multi-cultural such that in the living out of

³⁴⁷ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p236

³⁴⁸ David Kaplan. *Ricoeur’s Critical Theory*. 2003, p109

³⁴⁹ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p236

³⁵⁰ Ibid, p237

the “good life” one is caught up not just with oneself or with members of one’s religious community, but with others. These “anonymous others” have to be carefully considered in my desire to live the “good life”.

Mutual co-existence, which is the consequence of this reciprocity of respect, is better fostered when one knows and understands that which constitutes the other’s sense of the “good life”. To know the other demands that we learn from them and if we are to learn from each other, then this exercise of learning could take place through the medium of dialogue as “the sharing of mutual testimonies”. However, for such genuine dialogues to occur, the other must be recognized as an equal-partner who also possesses a unique understanding of what it means to live the “good life”. Viewing the other as an equal-partner-in-dialogue is not based on the understanding that they share the same faith principles as we do. It is based on the recognition that just as I have faith principles which form the basis for my beliefs in God, so does the other and if I desire to be listened to and appreciated, so does the other.

3.3. The Ethical and Moral Implications of Narrative Identity for Dialogue

We defined interreligious dialogue in chapter two as the constructive and positive conversation between people of different religious traditions on issues of religious significance for the purpose of mutual learning, growth and enrichment. In the light of Christian-Muslim dialogue, we proposed Christology as the context for dialogue as an exercise in learning from and about the other. Within this form of dialogue, two issues need to be clarified: “learning about” and “learning from” the other. The “other” here is used interchangeably to refer to either Christianity or Islam or their respective adherents. Hence, whereas the Muslim could be considered other to the Christian, so also is the Christian to the Muslim.

To “learn about the other” implies the desire to acquire knowledge concerning the other. In respect of Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology, “to learn about the other” therefore defines a certain interest in knowing the Islamic or Christian tradition-specific understanding of Christology. By “tradition-Specific understanding”, we mean the Christian or Islamic orthodox understanding of Christology which answers the question:

who is Jesus Christ in Islam or in Christianity? If knowledge of the other is to be shared, then it demands that the other truly knows who Jesus is within their tradition-specific context and should be committed in explaining and defending this body of knowledge. Knowledge of one's tradition and commitment to it is viewed here as a *sine qua non* for the success of dialogue as an exercise in learning.

However, "to learn from the other" goes beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge about the other's belief-systems to include applying that knowledge (modified or not) to one's way of life. It involves a sense of creativity whereby the acquired knowledge from the other is meaningfully integrated into one's way of life, contributing to enriching it. This sense of enrichment could take the form of how it changes one's perceptions of the others, leading to respect and appreciation of the other's viewpoints. Taken religiously, learning from the other could also lead one to develop a sharpened awareness of the particularity of one's own religious beliefs and the significant place they occupy in one's aim to live the "good life". It could also lead the interlocutors to the discoveries of the similarities that lie between their respective faith perspectives which they previously did not know. In whichever way this occurs, learning would have taken place. As we can see, for this form of dialogue to take place it needs to be guided by some necessary conditions which we call dialogical attitude: i.e. *commitment*, *openness*, *respect* for the other and *equality*. These necessary conditions to dialogue contribute significantly in helping the interlocutors to cultivate the appropriate dialogical dispositions that facilitate the process of dialogue as an exercise in learning. Let us consider them below.

3.3.1. Self-esteem and the Value of Commitment

The virtue of *commitment* defines the idea of being dedicated, devoted and faithful to a cause. It conveys a sense of rootedness. Understood interreligiously, *commitment* highlights one's faithfulness to the doctrines and practices of the religious tradition to which one belongs. It defines the attitude of believing and belonging to a particular religious community. As Cornille puts it, religious commitment is "a deliberate identification with the teachings and practices of a particular tradition. It thus entails assent to the truth-claims of a particular tradition and recognition of the authority of the tradition

in matters of doctrine and discipline”.³⁵¹ Though we indicated that the establishment of religious commitment occurs against the background of critical reflection as to whether the tradition provides guidance to the living out of the good life, it must be said here that the process itself is not also devoid of the practice of inherited faith.³⁵²

Whether established through inherited faith or through critical reflection or both, religious commitment represents the esteem of the self for the teachings and practices of a particular tradition to which one belongs. If *attestation* is a statement of conviction and confidence in one’s beliefs, then in an interreligious dialogue context *attestation* derives its meaning also from the commitment of the believer. It is one’s commitment to the religion which contributes to defining who one is – otherwise there can be no attested to self. Hence, commitment is a necessary condition for dialogue as an exercise in learning. As Dupuis puts it, “honesty and sincerity specifically require that the various partners enter it and commit themselves to it in the integrity of their faith. Any methodical doubt, any mental reservation, is out of place here”.³⁵³

But this form of commitment must be informed by the interlocutors’ understanding of the teachings and practices of their respective traditions on Christology. This is because dialogue as an exercise in learning from and about the other demands knowledge of the Christology of one’s religion so as to meaningfully share it with others. It consists of what Panikkar calls intra-religious dialogue³⁵⁴ – a dialogue where one consciously and critically appropriates one’s own tradition to deeply understand it. Without this deep understanding of and commitment to one’s own tradition, there are simply no grounds for dialogue to proceed.

3.3.2. Respect for Others and the Value of Openness

In Ricoeur’s view, esteem for oneself and for others is very fundamental for the establishment of meaningful relationships. This is because Ricoeur believes that “I cannot have self-esteem unless I esteem others as myself. ‘As myself’ means that you too are

³⁵¹ Catherine Cornille. *The Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*. 2008, p66

³⁵² By “inherited faith,” we mean the passing on of family beliefs from one generation to the other.

³⁵³ Dupuis, Jacques. *Christianity and the Religious*. 2001, p228

³⁵⁴ *Intrareligious dialogue* “is an inner dialogue within myself, an encounter in the depths of my personal religiousness.” (Panikkar. *Intra-Religious Dialogue*. 1999, p73-74)

capable of starting something in the world, of acting for a reason, of hierarchizing your priorities, of evaluating the ends of your actions and, having done this, of holding yourself in esteem as I hold myself in esteem”.³⁵⁵ To understand the other in this way is to recognise and respect their integrity as I would want my integrity respected. Thus, it establishes a kind of solicitude between oneself and the other based on mutual respect – the kind of respect which goes beyond treating people simply as means to an end to treating them as ends-in-themselves. While the first exploits and violates their integrity, the second recognises and preserves it.

If the virtue of openness in dialogue means the willingness to enter into dialogue by sharing my testimonies of faith with the other while listening with generosity to the other’s testimonies of faith, then openness is founded on the respect one has for the other. Here, the value of openness begins from my recognition and acknowledgment that the other is an authentic other who also possesses unique truths which I desire to learn. As Panikkar puts it, the other here “is not just an other (*alius*) and much less an object of my knowledge (*aliud*), but another self (*alter*) who is a source of self understanding and also of understanding, not necessarily reducible to my own”.³⁵⁶ It is on the basis of this sense of respect for the traditions of the other which sets dialogue as an exercise in learning on a hopeful course.

3.3.3. The Principle of Equality or Equal-Partners-in-Dialogue

Within the context of the ethical intention, Ricoeur asserted that *just institutions* use the principles of justice and equality to ensure the equitable distribution of benefits and burdens, rewards and tasks among the different members of society. Whether understood as the sense of justice in the ethical plane or in the Rawlsian conception of fairness in the moral plane; the principle of equality attempts to regulate “what is fair to each one as anonymous members of the society”.³⁵⁷ Its distributive principle “consists in equalizing

³⁵⁵ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p193

³⁵⁶ Panikkar. *Intra-Religious Dialogue*. 1999, p33-34

³⁵⁷ David Kaplan. *Ricoeur’s Critical Theory*. 2003, p106

two relations between, in each case, a person and merit ”.³⁵⁸ Consequently, it ensures that the beliefs, needs and aspirations of some are not sacrificed for or violated by the interests of others. In this way, the principle of equality ensures that the views of all members of the society are fairly served.

It is the above sense of equality which is at the heart of dialogue as an exercise in learning. In his seventh “Ground Rules to Interreligious Dialogue”, Swidler rightly pointed out that “dialogue can only take place between equals”.³⁵⁹ This sense of equality is informed by the fact that one does not consider the other’s religious tradition or theological views inferior to one’s own. It does not glory in absolutist or exclusivist claims which denigrate the other’s viewpoints nor does it relativizes one’s religious beliefs in the face of the other. Here, the principle of equal-partners-in-dialogue recognises and respects the other’s belief systems as constitutive truths within their original tradition-specific contexts. That which dialogue as an exercise in learning then offers is the opportunity to learn from what the other has to say in respect of their beliefs.

In consequence, we could say that religious commitment remains the foundation from which authentic interreligious dialogue occurs. It is from one’s commitments that one seeks to know the commitments of another. As Dupuis indicated, “it is in the fidelity to these personal nonnegotiable convictions, honestly accepted on both sides, that interreligious dialogue takes place ‘between equal’ – in their differences”.³⁶⁰ In this way, the tension between commitment and openness is neither dissipated nor resolved but is made creative in an on-going process whose interest is learning from and about the other.

However, what happens when the living out of the ethical intention through the moral norm produces conflicts of obligations? In other words, if we agree that Islam and Christianity are unique religions with different systems of belief, what happens when differences in christological understandings create dialogical aporias in their assessment of what is considered a value to them? In response, let us turn to Ricoeur’s notion of practical wisdom understood as the appropriate judgement of situations for the good of the situation.

³⁵⁸ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p201

³⁵⁹ Leonard Swidler. *Towards a Universal Theology of Religion*. 1988, p15

³⁶⁰ Jacques Dupuis. *Christianity and the Religions*. 2003, p129

3.4. The Hermeneutics of the Self and Practical Wisdom

By way of recall, we noted that Ricoeur's "little ethics" sought to establish a relationship of subordination and complementarity between ethics and morality. In doing this, Ricoeur proposed three theses: (1) the primacy of ethics over morality, (2) the necessity for the ethics to be mediated by the moral norm, (3) the recourse morality must take to ethics to resolve morally conflictual situations. The exercise we have undertaken so far has been an investigation into the first two theses. This section concentrates on the third thesis – the recourse morality must take to ethics to resolve moral conflicts. Ricoeur calls this *practical wisdom* – the appropriate judgement of situations for the best of situations in the effort to live "the good life with and for others in just institutions".

Ricoeur undertakes this project within the context of tragic wisdom. For him, tragedy produces ethico-practical aporias. Ricoeur cites examples of such aporetic situations in Greek tragedy; like the case of Antigone and Creon³⁶¹ who find themselves in conflicting moral obligations. Without intending to recount these stories, what Ricoeur emphasizes in these accounts is the moral obligation which forces Antigone to give her brother a sepulchre in accordance to custom, even though he has become an enemy of the city. For Ricoeur, this act expresses something more than the rights of the family in opposition to those of the city.³⁶² Here, one finds that the bond between sister and brother supersedes the political distinction between friend and enemy. However, in the case of the city in whose defence Creon "subordinates his family bonds by forbidding the burial of the friend now become an enemy, it too receives from its mythical and from its lasting religious structure, a significance that is more than political".³⁶³

In these two tragic cases, therefore, one finds discordance in the way Antigone and Creon draw the lines between friend and enemy. For Ricoeur, the practical determination of these two cases "cannot be reduced to simple modalities of choices along the lines described by Aristotle and Kant".³⁶⁴ Something more is needed and in the light of

³⁶¹ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p242-244

³⁶² Ibid, p241-241

³⁶³ Ibid, p242

³⁶⁴ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p242

Sophocles' *Antigone*, Ricoeur relies on tragic wisdom.³⁶⁵ According to Ricoeur, "tragic wisdom" is capable of directing us in conflicts of different nature – conflicts which arise as a result of conflicting moral obligations. Like the tragedy of *Antigone* we are also, in some way, caught up with the interminable opposition between man and woman, old age and youth, society and the individual, the living and the dead – an opposition whose solution is not to be sought in an either/or dialectic.

In the same way, the conflicts that arise as a result of our obligations to one thing or another are not merely resolved by recourse to morality or ethics or even a synthesis of the two. What is to be sought in such aporetic situations is "practical wisdom".³⁶⁶ Practical wisdom is the appropriate application of universal norms in situations where one is confronted by conflicting moral obligations. It is neither synthetic nor disavows the morality of obligation but is designed to give guidance as to how one can act appropriately and justly in aporetic situations. It is the art of mediating the requirements of the ethical aim and the moral norm so as to be able to act appropriately and thereby contribute to establishing happiness with and for others in just institutions.³⁶⁷

Taking the triadic components of the ethical aim (just institutions, respect for persons and autonomy), Ricoeur demonstrates how morally conflictual situations arise within these different components.³⁶⁸ However, we shall only focus attention on two examples of moral conflicts within the context of respect for person and show how Ricoeur proposes a mediation of them through practical wisdom. The reasons for this delimitation are as follows: while the reciprocity of respect (solicitude) constitutes the dialogic structure of self-esteem/respect, the principles of justice and equality are the extension of solicitude

³⁶⁵ Sophocles is a tragic Greek playwright who presents a terrifying image of man as a species whose ability to master nature is paralleled only by his failure to master himself. In other words, man seems to be in control of nature, yet uncontrollable (cf. *Antigone*, 368ff).

³⁶⁶ Ricoeur refers to "practical wisdom" as the moral judgement made in particular situations and the convictions that dwell in it. For Ricoeur, if moral judgments indeed develop aporetic situations, then "convictions remain the only available way out." (See Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p240-241)

³⁶⁷ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p240

³⁶⁸ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p249-282

at the level of just institutions. As Ricoeur puts it, “the sense of justice takes nothing away from solicitude but presupposes it to the extent that it holds persons to be irreplaceable”.³⁶⁹

Since self-respect (autonomy) and the principles of justice and equality (just institutions) can be derived from respect for persons (solicitude), we deem that the focus on two examples of the conflicts generated in solicitude and how practical wisdom mediates between them would, to some extent, provide an implied sense of how practical wisdom could mediate between morally conflictual situations at the levels of society and the individual. Apart from this reason, not only is time and space a factor, but the attempt to give a comprehensive treatment to the other components would digress from the thesis of the chapter. Thus, let us address the two examples of moral conflicts in solicitude or respect for persons and how practical wisdom mediates between them.

3.4.1. Respect for Persons and Conflicts

Ricoeur’s moral principle of respect for persons hinges on the second Kantian Categorical Imperative: “treat humanity in one’s own person and in the person of others as an end in itself and not as a means”.³⁷⁰ For Ricoeur, one finds in this imperative a fine dividing line between the universalist version of the imperative (represented by the idea of humanity) and the pluralist version of it (represented by the idea of persons as ends in themselves). Whereas Kant finds no opposition between the two versions,³⁷¹ Ricoeur asserts that a conflict arises “as soon as the otherness of persons, inherent in the very idea of human plurality, proves to be... incompatible with the universality of the rules that underlie the idea of humanity”.³⁷² Here, respect due to persons splits up “into respect for the law and respect for persons”.³⁷³ Under these competing claims between respect for persons and respect for the law, practical wisdom may constitute “giving priority to the respect for persons in the name of the solicitude that is addressed to persons in their irreplaceable singularity”.³⁷⁴

³⁶⁹ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p202

³⁷⁰ Ibid, p262

³⁷¹ Ibid, p263

³⁷² Ibid, p262

³⁷³ Ibid, p262

³⁷⁴ Ibid, p262

Ricoeur examines the idea of promise-keeping in the light of the application of the second Kantian Categorical Imperative and those sanctioned by law. According to Ricoeur, the Constitutive rule of promising says that “A places himself under the obligation of doing X on behalf of B in circumstance Y”.³⁷⁵ Here, the principle of fidelity³⁷⁶ defines the obligation to keep one’s promises. It begins from the firm intention or the commitment to do what the other expects of me. As a rule of reciprocity, it “establishes the other in the position of someone to whom an obligation is owed, someone who is counting on me and making self-constancy a response to this expectation”.³⁷⁷

In respect of promises sanctioned by laws, oaths and contracts, Ricoeur says that “the expectations of others who count on me... becomes a right to require something of me”.³⁷⁸ Though the promise-to-keep-the-law takes us into the area of legal norms which seem to obliterate the relations between the norm and solicitude when one reconsiders the forms of promise sanctioned by the courts, there still remains a tie between the normative moment and the ethical intentions expressed as: “‘from you’ says the other, ‘I expect that you would keep your word; to you I reply, ‘you can count on me.’”³⁷⁹ So, counting-on-me “connects self-constancy in its moral tenor to the principle of reciprocity founded in solicitude”.³⁸⁰

Since the above discourse constitutes the context within which self-constancy is maintained through promise-keeping and the obligation imposed on one by law, the conflicts of moral duty arise when one makes exceptions to the maxim on behalf of oneself or on behalf of others. Here, Ricoeur cites two examples of morally conflictual situations and how practical wisdom mediates between them to facilitate the path to the living-out of the good life with and for others in just institutions. Whereas one example is cited from the “beginning of life”, the other comes from the “end of life” situations.

The first example concerns whether or not to tell the truth to the dying. Here, a breach occurs between two extreme attitudes: either telling the truth to a dying person out

³⁷⁵ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p262

³⁷⁶ Ibid, p262

³⁷⁷ Ibid, p268

³⁷⁸ Ibid, p268

³⁷⁹ Ibid, p268

³⁸⁰ Ibid, p268

of sheer respect for the law and without the concern for the capacity of the dying person to receive the truth or consciously lying to the dying person out of fear that the truth might agonise the dying person. How does practical wisdom apply in such situations? For Ricoeur, practical wisdom would consist of inventing the just behaviour best suited for each case. It considers as false the establishment of rules out of the duty to lie to the patient for fear that the truth might cause them more pain. It therefore disallows “transforming into a rule, the exceptions of the rule”.³⁸¹

Practical wisdom focuses on how to communicate the truth to the patient in the most appropriate way taking into consideration the condition of the patient. As Ricoeur puts it, “it is one thing to name an illness, it is quite another to reveal the degree of seriousness and the slight chances of survival and yet another to wield the clinical truth as a death sentence”.³⁸² By focusing on the appropriate way to communicate the truth, practical wisdom also takes cognizance of the fact that there are some situations where even telling the truth to the patient “becomes the opportunity for the exchange of giving and receiving under the sign of the acceptance of death”.³⁸³ Thus, it demands that we carefully judge the situation with the aid of expert advice. This advice then helps one to take the best suited step in response to the rule of reciprocity and respect.

The second example relates to respect for persons at the “beginning of life” or the problem of abortions. Abortions cause difficult moral problems because of the ontological questions which are posed at the beginning of life. For instance, what is the nature of the being of the embryo and the foetus? If Kant’s statement that “rational beings exist as ends in themselves” is to be taken seriously as the basis for respect due to persons, then the difficult moral question is – what sort of being are the embryo and the foetus? Are they things or persons? If one follows Kant’s argument that “only rational beings exist in themselves”, then the implication remains that only fully developed rational beings have moral standing and since the foetus and embryo are not fully rational they have no moral standing.

³⁸¹ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p269

³⁸² Ibid, p269

³⁸³ Ibid, p270

Construing the human person based on the Kantian “rational being” proposition contradicts the views of others who focus essentially on life as the presence and absence of the human person. For advocates of the biological criterion, a “person and life are indissociable inasmuch as the latter supports the former”.³⁸⁴ For them, the genomics of heredity which defines biologic individuality is constituted at the moment of conception. This means that human life begins at the moment of conception. In this way “the embryo’s ‘right to life’ is a right to a ‘chance to live.’”³⁸⁵ Thus, any practice that does not serve this “presumed ends of the embryo and the foetus, which are to live and to develop, is to be prohibited”.³⁸⁶

Practical wisdom therefore mediates between Kant’s rational beings view and the views of the biologic school by stirring a middle ground between the understanding of persons and things. Here, it focuses on the position of the biological school to determine the phenomenon of the “thresholds and stages of the development of life” through a progressive ontology which recognizes embryos as potential human beings whose rational capacities develop over time.³⁸⁷ This is then used to defend the rights of foetuses as persons.

Thus, practical wisdom affirms that there are different stages of the development of the human person from the human embryo to the fully developed person. Embryos are therefore potential human beings. So, in each stage of their development there is a progression of qualitatively different rights and duties: the right not to suffer, the duty to prevent suffering, the right to protection and the obligation to offer it and the right to respect and the duty to give it, “once something like an exchange – even dissymmetrical, of proverbial signs is begun between the foetus and its mother”.³⁸⁸

In consequence, practical wisdom in these and similar moral conflictual situations has the following features: firstly, it upholds the moral norm, though it may apply it differently according to different situations; secondly, it searches for a “just mean” or the

³⁸⁴ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p270

³⁸⁵ Ibid, p271

³⁸⁶ Ibid, p271

³⁸⁷ Ibid, p271

³⁸⁸ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself As Another*. 1992, p272

Aristotelian *mesotēs* i.e. it searches for a common ground or a negotiation of the broken middle; thirdly, as a judgement in situations, practical wisdom always relies on the knowledge of competent and wise experts, in order to traverse the domain of arbitrariness and make appropriate judgements of the situation.³⁸⁹ As Kaplan puts it, a person of practical wisdom “confers with others in order to arrive at an informed, just and appropriate action”.³⁹⁰

In considering practical wisdom in the light of Christian-Muslim dialogue, one could say that in the case of the conflict of interpretations concerning the meaning of, for instance, a christological title like *Messiah* which is common to Islam and Christianity, practical wisdom would first of all consist of understanding its meaning within each traditions and the theological frameworks which give rise to its meaning. Hence, a consideration of the principle of the *Tawhid* and the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and how they give meaning to the Christian and Islamic interpretations of the title is helpful. Here, the views of recognised Islamic and Christian scholars may contribute to giving clarity to the understanding of the concept within the two traditions.

In the case of Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology as an exercise in learning, practical wisdom would also emphasize on how Christians and Muslims can learn from each other on the basis of the message of Jesus as it reflects in their respective traditions. Here, though the title *Messiah* may mean differently between the two traditions, practical wisdom does not emphasize on “who is the right claimant of truth about the meaning of the title”, but what can be learnt from the message, the life and mission of the title bearer in the living out of the good life with and for others in just institutions? This is the significant question which will guide our deliberations in chapters five and six.

3.5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it must be said that Christology is still, today, a hotbed for contentious Christian-Muslim conversations. These contentions seem to have been worsened by the negative perceptions both Christians and Muslims have about each other’s Scriptures and

³⁸⁹ Ibid, p273

³⁹⁰ David Kaplan. *Ricoeur’s Critical Theory*. 2003, p113

the place of Jesus in these Scriptures. Yet Jesus remains a common historical personality to both traditions. Though differences in religious traditions may be the reason for the sometimes deadening apologetics between them, much of these are also the results of unresolved prejudices each have about the other. This is why dialogue on Christology as an exercise in learning is deemed relevant for clarifying some of these prejudices, where possible.

Here, learning has the capacity to clarify unfounded prejudices and set the dialogical parties on a new form of interrelationship defined by what Ricoeur refers to as aiming at the good life with and for others in just institutions. If we consider that in interreligious dialogue the “good life” could also mean “a life lived in submission to God” expressed in the love of God and love of neighbour; then aiming at the “good life” is not only undertaken in isolation, but together with others through the institutions which shape and guide their respective understandings of the good life. However, living a good life together with others in just institutions demands that we cultivate certain attitudes or dispositions in respect of our perceptions of the other and how we relate to them. In other words, the encounter with the other demands honest, sincere and respectful relationships. We consider that dialogue as an exercise in learning is made possible under some necessary conditions such as *commitment*, *openness*, *respect* for others and the recognition of the other as an *equal partner*. In the discourses above, we found that Ricoeur’s three components of the ethical intention somehow provided the medium for further reflections on these necessary conditions also called the appropriate dialogical attitudes.

Consequently, the thesis of this chapter lies in the claim that: for Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology to succeed as an exercise in learning, it must take serious considerations of the above necessary conditions to dialogue with the other. By so doing, the locus of learning would then lie in what the self and other have to say about Jesus. For Islam Jesus is a “prophet or messenger of Allah”, while for Christianity he is the “Son of God” or the incarnate Word of God. Thus, let us now specifically turn to what Christians and Muslims mean when they consider Jesus as the “Son of God” and the “prophet of Allah” respectively. Here, the question to be asked is: what can Christians and Muslims learn from each other about Jesus Christ?

PART TWO

COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY AND CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DIALOGUE ON CHRISTOLOGY AS AN EXERCISE IN LEARNING

CHAPTER FOUR

4. TOWARDS THE TRADITION-SPECIFIC UNDERSTANDINGS OF CHRISTOLOGY: CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM PERSPECTIVES

4.1. Introduction

The thesis of this chapter is built on the argument that Christianity and Islam have tradition-specific responses to the christological question: “Who do you say Jesus is?” Consequently, as an exercise in learning from and about the other, Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology needs to begin from these responses. By tradition-specific understandings, we mean the ‘distinctively Christian or Muslim orthodox responses to questions regarding the identity and mission of Jesus Christ. As we asserted in chapter three under the category of commitment and openness to the other, genuine dialogue demands that one shares with the other from the integrity of one’s faith. It also requires that one is open to learn from and about what the other has to say about Jesus from the integrity of their faith.³⁹¹ Thus, the Christian and Islamic tradition-specific understanding of Christology is significant for the success of dialogue as an exercise in learning.

Though construed differently, Jesus is significantly referenced in the scriptural canons of both Islam and Christianity. While Christians conceive that Jesus Christ is “God or the Son of God”, Muslims believe that Jesus is “a prophet of Allah”. Consequently, a Christian-Muslim comparative theological approach to Christology needs to investigate what Christians and Muslims mean when they conceive Jesus as “God or Son of God” and “a prophet of Allah” on the one hand and the theological frameworks which support these conceptions. This is considered relevant because such an approach would enable the

³⁹¹ Dupuis. *Christianity and the Religions*. 2001, p230

dialogical partners to understand and appreciate the basis from which each tradition theologizes about Jesus Christ the way it does.

A careful survey of the christological literature of both Christianity and Islam reveals that these two faith communities appear to have more to say about Jesus Christ than any other religion in the world. Yet between them, the identity and mission of Jesus remains a contentious theological subject – sometimes dividing them irreconcilably. For this reason Charles Kimball could ask; “Why have these two communities clashed so vigorously through the centuries? What informs the sense of mistrust that pervades the history of Christian-Muslim relations and skews every attempt to relate more constructively today?”³⁹² For Douglas Pratt, the reason is because Christianity and Islam are pre-eminently religions of belief. Each has had to struggle to define its own orthodoxy from variant heterodoxies and heresies from within, with a “history of self-proclamation as universal truths over against any claimant of truth from without”.³⁹³

Tarif Khalidi however thinks that the Qur’anic Jesus is made to distance himself from the doctrines that his own community (Christianity) holds of him. According to Khalidi, the bulk of references to Jesus in the Qur’an “come in the form of divine pronouncements which speak about him or on behalf of him; passages that remind Jesus himself or mankind in general that God is the ultimate creator and master of the life and destiny of Jesus, as of all creation”.³⁹⁴ As if to say, “here, then, is the true Jesus ‘cleansed’ of the ‘perversions’ of his followers, a prophet totally obedient to his maker and offered up as the true alternative to the Jesus of the incarnation, crucifixion and redemption”.³⁹⁵ Here, Christians are left to wonder where the biblical narratives of Jesus have gone.³⁹⁶

Whether or not Pratt and Khalidi provide adequate responses to Kimball’s question, our claim here is this: the identity and mission of Jesus Christ is differently construed in Christianity and Islam. These different religious traditions have their respective theologies which provide the framework for a systematic understanding of his identity and mission

³⁹² Charles Kimball. *Striving Together: A Way Forward in Christian-Muslim Relations*. 1991, p37

³⁹³ Douglas Pratt. *The Challenge of Islam*. 2005, p101

³⁹⁴ Tarif Khalidi. *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*. 2001, p15

³⁹⁵ Ibid, p15

³⁹⁶ Samuel Zwemer. *The Moslem Christ*. 1912, p7

within their own contexts. For instance, Jesus as a prophet of Allah perfectly fits into the Islamic acknowledgement of the *Tawhid*. Here, Jesus' divinity as expressed in the incarnation, the crucifixion, suffering, death and resurrection cannot be supported. The Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity also supports the incarnation and resurrection, but forbids the reduction of Jesus' identity to the status of a prophet. Thus, one could view Jesus as both *bridge* and *barrier* to Christian-Muslim relations – a bridge because, both religions recognize him as a “historical personality” who proclaimed a unique message from God and a barrier because each has a unique theological framework within which he is construed.

The desire to understand these unique theologies is the motivation behind this chapter on “the tradition-specific understanding of Christology”. We deem this to be relevant because if we understand that the success of dialogue as “an exercise in learning” is the acquisition of something new from the other; then the fact that Christianity and Islam are religions with different traditions suggests that there is something more about Jesus in the other's tradition which we can learn in new and better ways. As we argued in chapter three, respect for the integrity of the other must first begin by allowing the other to communicate truths about Jesus as they pertain to their traditions. This chapter therefore seeks to create the appropriate platform for this mutual sharing to occur. Within this context of sharing as Gadamer puts it, “what is to be grasped is the substantive rightness of the other's opinion, so that we can be at one with each other on a subject”.³⁹⁷

4.2. Tradition-Specific Understanding of Christology: A Christian Perspective

“Christology” has its etymological roots from two Greek words: “Χριστός” (Christos) which means “Christ” and “λογία” (logos) which means “word, reason or the study of”. Since “Christ” refers to Jesus, we could say that “Christology” in the Christian context, means “the study of the person and mission of Jesus Christ” or as Raymond Brown puts it, “Christology would discuss how Jesus came to be called *Messiah* or Christ and what was meant by that designation”.³⁹⁸ From this perspective, Brown views Christology as that subject which discusses any evaluation of Jesus in respect to who he was and the role he

³⁹⁷ Gadamer. *Truth and Method*. 1989, p385

³⁹⁸ Raymond Brown. *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*. 1994, p3

played in the divine plan.³⁹⁹ It addresses issues relating to Jesus as both God and Man and how he became such in the incarnation. Whereas the Christian scriptures provide a wealth of evidence in relation to narratives that justify the conceptual pairing of the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ, Christology correlates and clarifies how this is made possible in the same person.

In other words, we could say that today, Christology represents a renewed response to the question Jesus put to his disciples: “Who do you say I am?” From the testimony of the synoptic Gospels, we find different responses to this christological question. In Mark 8:27-29, while others said he was John the Baptist, still others said he was Elijah or one of the Ancient prophets. But for Peter, Jesus is “the Christ, the son of the living God”. So from the text of Mark 8:27-29, we could say that these different responses represent the diverse understandings of the early Christians’ experience of Jesus, giving rise to what some scholars called the ‘multiple christologies’ of the New Testament.⁴⁰⁰

In our contemporary context, there is a growing interest among scholars who seek to find whether there is a correlation between Jesus’ self-understanding and the understanding of the disciples. As Raymond Brown rightly interrogated, “to what extent did what his followers said and thought about him corresponds to the image reflected in what he himself said and did?”⁴⁰¹ Are these in continuity with Chalcedonian Christology? Responses to these questions have equally precipitated multiple christological approaches such as *low Christology* (Christology from below) and *high Christology* (Christology from above) – sometimes set in diametrical opposition to each other. According to Brown, while “low christology” covers the evaluation of Jesus in terms that do not necessarily imply his divinity; “high christology” covers the evaluation of Jesus in terms that include an aspect of his divinity.⁴⁰²

Thus, there are variant responses to the Christological question – sometimes very similar with the responses of the immediate disciples of Jesus. However, do these different responses defy any possibility of a unified christological understanding of Jesus Christ for

³⁹⁹ Ibid, p3

⁴⁰⁰ Richard Longenecker. *Contours of Christology in the New Testament*. 2005, xiii

⁴⁰¹ Raymond Brown. *An Introduction o New Testament Christology*.1994, p6

⁴⁰² Ibid, p4

Christian faith and theology? For Longenecker, there may be distinctive features in the portrayals of Jesus by the New Testament writers, but “there is a certain ‘sense of centre’ in the various representations and statements about Jesus of Nazareth by the New Testament writers”.⁴⁰³ Trusting the veracity of Longenecker’s view in the light of the contemporary argument that “Christology is pluralistic in both method and content”,⁴⁰⁴ it could be said that Christian theology nonetheless continues to emphasize on this “sense of centre” as the appropriate Christian response to the christological question i.e. for Christian theology, Jesus is “the Christ, the son of the living God” (Mark 8:29).

In the light of the views that the synoptic Gospels portray Jesus Christ as one who was predominantly concerned with proclaiming the imminence of the kingdom of God and of its justice, without particular emphasis on himself as God,⁴⁰⁵ some scholars seem to battle with the question as to how the proclaimer or the bearer of the word of God could suddenly become the proclaimed or the essential content of that Word.⁴⁰⁶ They ask whether there is congruence between Jesus’ self understanding and the understanding of the early Christian community. Here, the question Muslims constantly put to Christians remains relevant: how could God become man in Jesus Christ and still retain his divine attributes?

The above questions point to the christological challenge which Christian theology is called upon to respond. Consequently, our interest in this section is to investigate into how the Synoptic Gospels (especially the Gospel of Mark) map out the identity and mission of Jesus Christ and how this is articulated in Christian theology today. We choose to take this route into the Christian perspective on Christology because: Christology represents an enormous branch of Christian theology whose scope cannot be covered in this limited space. As we shall see, Jesus Christ is the reason for Christian faith and hence, permeates the entirety of the Christian life and theology. So a Christology from a Christian perspective cannot be comprehensively attended to in the limited space provided here because it would consist in giving an account of Christian faith and theology which ranges

⁴⁰³ Richard Longenecker. (ed.). *Contours of Christology in the New Testament*. 2005, xiii

⁴⁰⁴ Roger Haight. *The Future of Christology*. 2007, p15

⁴⁰⁵ Kung. *Christianity and World Religions; Paths to dialogue*. 1993, p116

⁴⁰⁶ In reference to this notion of the preoccupation of Jesus, Adolf von Harnack said that “the gospel, as Jesus proclaimed it, has to do with the Father only, not with the Son” (Adolf von Harnack. *What is Christianity?* 19986, p144-162)

from *protology* to *eschatology*. However, since dialogue as an exercise in learning demands the sharing of mutual testimonies of faith about the life and mission of Jesus Christ, Christians cannot but present a Christian view of the identity and mission of Jesus Christ – one which is at once summarised and yet represents an authentic Christian perspective.

It is in response to the above duty to share the Christian story about Jesus Christ that we turn to the Christology of the synoptic Gospels, particularly the Gospel of Mark. While it is scholarly acclaimed that the synoptic Gospels “see Jesus Christ with the same eye” and so, tell similar stories about him; our interest in Mark’s Gospel is informed by how Mark presents the identity of Jesus Christ through his “Son of God” and “Son of Man” motifs. On the one hand, while this two-nature Christology represents the authentic Christian perspective on the identity of Jesus Christ, on the other hand, it is also the locus of conflict (the Son of God motif) between the Christian and Muslim understanding of Jesus Christ. Hence, a clarification on the metaphoricity of the “Son of God” motif in Christianity might contribute to changing Muslim perceptions about Christians, albeit the degree. Where this occurs, dialogue as an exercise in learning would have been all the more enriching – notwithstanding its emphasis on one’s commitment to the home tradition.

4.2.1. Christology in the Synoptic Gospels: the Markan Priority

The term “synoptic” has its etymology from two Greek words; “syn” and “optic” which means “together” and “seen” respectively. Hence, “synoptic” literally means “seeing together”. When applied to the Gospel material, synoptic characterizes those Gospels that “see together” or present the same narratives, in the same sequence and wording about Jesus Christ. The first three Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) are often defined by this category because of their degree of similarity in content, narrative structure, language and sentence formation. As Paul M. Haffner pointed out, “when placed side by side and brought in one view, these three Gospels present a striking resemblance and appear as one narrative”.⁴⁰⁷ Thus, Matthew, Mark and Luke are said to be so similar to each other that in a sense, they view Jesus Christ “with the same eye” in contrast to the very different picture

⁴⁰⁷ Paul Haffner. *New Testament Theology: An Introduction*. 2006, p135

of Jesus Christ presented in the Johannine Gospel. Yet, as Haffner indicated, there are also many significant differences between the synoptic Gospels. Hence, we consider that a focus on Mark's Christology would, to some degree, speak to the christological issues raised in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Why Mark's Gospel?

The Gospel of Mark is credited to John Mark, a companion of Peter the Apostle (see Acts 12:12-13, Col 4:10 and 1Tim 4:11). Whereas some scholars like Dominic Crossan think that Mark made use of earlier traditional sources (the Gospel of St Thomas or the Gospel of Barnabas) in composing his Gospel,⁴⁰⁸ scholarly consensus has it that Mark's Gospel was written between 60-70AD and is regarded as the earliest among the canonical Gospels.⁴⁰⁹ Mark's Gospel is the shortest among the canonical Gospels, written in primitive (simple) Greek possibly by an author who clearly has a first language other than Greek.⁴¹⁰ Its language is very direct and vivid. It has no background information about Jesus; especially his ancestry and other relevant biographical information as one might expect. The Gospel is equally stripped of the normal endings of Jesus' appearances after the resurrection, commonly associated with the other synoptics. So apart from the "son of God" and the "Son of Man" motifs, its earlier dating is the reason for our preference.

According to Morna Hooker, the best way to discover Mark's Christology is by considering the Gospel as it stands; a narrative Christology which can only be understood by studying the story that Mark tells.⁴¹¹ If dialogue demands that we listen carefully to what the other has to say about Jesus, then it is all the more necessary for us to be attentive to the story Mark tells about Jesus. Many scholars agree that the narrative structure of Mark's Gospel consists of the Prologue (1:1-15), the Galilean Ministry (1:16 – 8:26), the Way of the Cross (8:27 – 15:39) and Epilogue (15:40 – 16:8). Kummel however indicates

⁴⁰⁸ For Dominic Crossan, there are four layers in the Jesus tradition which correspond to four different periods: (1) 30-60 AD (2) 60-80 AD (3) 80-120 AD (4) 120-150 AD. In these layers, Crossan suggested that his work went "beyond the present Gospel of Mark to an earlier layer to which he places the source Q, the Gospel of Thomas, and the genuine letters of Paul." (See Hans Schwarz. *Christology*. 1998, p68ff)

⁴⁰⁹ Raymond Brown . *Introduction to the New Testament*. 1997, p164; Morna D. Hooker. "Who Can This Be? The Christology of Mark's Gospel." 2005, p79

⁴¹⁰ Richard Burridge. & Gould, Graham. *Jesus Now and Then*. 2004, p54

⁴¹¹ Morna D. Hooker. "Who Can This Be?" 2005, p80

that the epilogue (Mk 16:9-20) is not part of the original Mark.⁴¹² From this structure, one could study Mark's Christology in different ways: either by focusing on the healings, exorcisms and miracle stories or by the titles used by Jesus or designated to him. For this study, we propose an entry into Markan Christology through the titles "the Son of God" and "the Son of Man". Here, we shall argue that Mark's authorial intent is unmistakably stated in the prologue of the Gospel, with the rest of the narrative being a progressive development of this intent. As we indicated in the introduction, the work here is not exegetical *per se* but a theological reading or interpretation of the Gospel.

4.2.1.1. The Prologue of Mark (1: 1-15)

According to Donald English, Mark's purpose is to be found in the prologue, especially in the opening thirteen verses which "sets it out in breathtaking clarity".⁴¹³ The prologue to the Gospel begins in Mk 1:1 – "this is the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God".⁴¹⁴ According to Hooker, Mark sees the Gospel (the Good News) to be, not just about Jesus Christ, but Jesus Christ himself. This is attested to by the fact that from Mk 1:9 onward, Jesus would become the central figure in the narrative. Furthermore, the fact that Mark describes Jesus as the "Christ" (*Christos*) and as the "Son of God" (*huios Theou*) in Mk1:1 further defines his authorial intent concerning Jesus' identity and mission.

But what does Mark mean by "Christ" and "Son of God?" Though one finds the answer to this question in the prologue, it is also located in the main narrative of the Gospel. In the prologue, Mark first of all, draws continuity between Jesus and God's previous activities in the world (Mk1:2-3) – "Look, I am sending out my messenger ahead of you to prepare your way..." According to Morna Hooker, Mark attributes this quotation (which is a mixture of Exodus 23:20, Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3) to the prophet Isaiah⁴¹⁵ who is a strong pillar in the Old Testament (OT) prophetic narratives. By establishing that

⁴¹² Mark 16:9-20 concerns the resurrection and post-resurrection experiences. For many scholars, this part of the Gospel is an addition to the oldest manuscript traceable to the author. (Kummel, Werner, and George. *Introduction to the New Testament*. 1975, p96-101; Jack Kingsbury. *The Christology of Mark's Gospel*. 1983, p47-173; K. E. Bailey. "The Rhetorical Structure of Mark 15:20-39", in *ExpT*, Vol. 102 (1991)

⁴¹³ Donald English. *The Message of Mark: The Mystery of Faith*. 1992, p15

⁴¹⁴ The *Holy Bible* (Revised Standard Version)

⁴¹⁵ Morna D. Hooker. "Who Can This Be?" 2005, p82

continuity between Jesus and the prophet Isaiah, Mark “sees Jesus as the fulfilment of OT hopes and as the one who brings redemption that is, in effect, a new exodus ”.⁴¹⁶

Secondly, John the Baptist who is the last of the OT prophets is presented in the Gospel as the “voice” that cries in the wilderness (1:3). Here, John functions as the one who calls the nation to repentance through baptism (1:4-5) and to some extent, a herald and a witness to the identity of the one he announces (1:7-8).⁴¹⁷ Thirdly, the voice from heaven which said; “You are my son, the beloved with whom I am well pleased” (1:11), seals Mark’s Christological intent in that the “heavenly Father’s” voice is identified as God himself. So, if God calls Jesus His son, what further evidence does one need to ascertain Jesus’ divine sonship? This made Donald English assert that Mk 1:11 “provide the closing brackets of the parenthesis which began with the Son of God in Mk 1:1 ”.⁴¹⁸

In consequence, Mark provides the reader with three veritable testimonies to the identity of Jesus in the prologue: i.e. the testimony of the scriptures through the prophet Isaiah, the witness of John the Baptist as a herald and above all, the affirmation of a heavenly higher authority (a God-Father). As Morna Hooker puts it, “whatever answers are given to the question ‘who is Jesus?’ in the rest of the narrative would certainly have to be judged against this one”.⁴¹⁹ Hence, what follows the prologue is the progressive development of Mark’s Christology in the main narrative; built on the “Son of God” and “Son of Man” motif. These two christological titles would provide access to a fuller comprehension of Mark’s story about Jesus Christ.

Without the presumption that the prologue is the summary of the content of the Gospel, it could be said that the prologue in Mark’s Gospel gives clarity to the words and deeds of Jesus which follow from Mk1:16 – 15:47. The corpus of Mk1:16 – 15:47 is divided into two sections, defined by the density of the two christological titles: “Son of God” and “Son of Man”. Peter’s confession on the way to Caesarea Philippi (Mk8:27-30) would be the watershed which separates these two titles and yet unites them in an holistic narrative which concerns Mark’s story about the identity and mission of Jesus Christ.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid, p82

⁴¹⁷ Ibid, p82

⁴¹⁸ Donald English. *The Message of Mark*. 1992, p16

⁴¹⁹ Morna D. Hooker. “Who Can This Be?” 2005, p82

Thus, the first section is defined by the density of the “Son of God” sayings and implications (1:16 – 8:26), while the second section has the dominance of the “Son of Man” sayings and implications (8:31 – 15:47). However, it must be said that the two sections are not entirely exclusive to each other in the use of these christological titles. Occasionally, one finds the title “Son of God” in the second section and vice versa. This intertwinement probably demonstrates how the titles are united and yet separated in providing a single narrative about the identity and mission of Jesus Christ. Let us see how Mark develops this in his Gospel.

4.2.1.2. Jesus Christ as the “Son of God” in Mark (1:16 – 8:26)

Many New Testament (NT) scholars have variously noted the conspicuously favoured position Mark gives the title “Son of God” to Jesus. The title appears in the opening lines of the prologue (1:1), it is proclaimed by the voice from heaven at Jesus’ Baptism (1:11), it is confessed by the demons as Jesus subdues them (3:11 and 5:7), the “voice from heaven” proclaims it again at the Mount of Transfiguration (9:7), Jesus himself claims it at the high priest’s interrogation (14:61-62), the Centurion confesses it at the foot of the cross (15:39) and other instances in which by word or deed or both, Jesus directly or indirectly shows the appropriateness of the use of this title in reference to himself (13:32). Though Jesus is not seen to openly refer to himself by this title, except in response to the question put to him by the High Priest (Mk14:61), he neither openly objected to it anytime he was addressed by it. As Lewis S. Hay pointed out, “that Mark had a high regard for the title is not seriously questioned, but the precise meaning of the title to the Evangelist is a matter of sharp debate”.⁴²⁰ What then did Mark mean by use of the title Son of God?

The title “Son of God” has frequently been used in the OT. Thus, understanding its meaning and context within the OT might offer us helpful insights into Mark’s understanding of the title. According to Cornelius Aherne, “the word ‘Son’ was employed among the Semites to signify not only filiation, but other close connexion and intimate relationship”.⁴²¹ Hence, one finds descriptions such as the “son of strength” (meaning a

⁴²⁰ Lewis Hay. “The Son-of-God Christology in Mark.” 1964 (2): 106

⁴²¹ Cornelius Aherne. “Son of God.” *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*. Vol. 14. 2010
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14142b.htm> (03/03/2013)

hero), the “son of Belial” (meaning a wicked man), the “sons of prophets” (meaning the disciples of prophets) and so forth. From this sense of established relationships, the title “Son of God” was applied in the OT to persons who have such special relationships with God. For instance, the Angels, devout men, the descendants of Seth were called sons of God (See Job 1:6, 2:1, Ps 88:7, Wis 2:13).

The title also refers to Israel as a nation (Ex 4:22, Deut 14:50, Jeremiah 31:9, Hosea 11:1) and to Israel’s leaders who owe their authority to God (2Sam 7:14, 1Chr 17:13, Ps 2:7). In the light of Israelite kingship, the title is also used in reference to Yahweh’s promise of the Messianic King. Here, James Dunn confirms that “in the Qumran scrolls, the royal *Messiah* is thought of as God’s son”.⁴²² Hence, the use of the title in the OT was more analogical and metaphorical than the literal sense of filiation. Could this be the same sense in Mark’s identification of Jesus as the Son of God?

Before responding to the above question, it might be helpful to try to conceptualize how the designation Son of God in Mark relates to Jesus’ identity as *Messiah*. This is significant because: first of all, the title *Messiah* feeds into Mark’s identification of Jesus as the “Son of God”. Secondly, the Qur’an in many verses also refers to Jesus as *Messiah* (*al-Masih* – see Surah 4:171). As a result, some Christian enthusiasts have the tendency to illegitimately impose Christian views on Islamic contexts when theologizing on *al-Masih*. In dialogue as an exercise in learning, both Christians and Muslims need to know what each mean when they refer to Jesus as *Messiah* or *al-Masih*. This is very significant for the prospects of dialogue as an exercise in learning from and about the other.

Mark’s identification of Jesus as *Messiah* begins in the prologue which has within it the key Greek terms: [ἡσοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ θεοῦ] or “Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mk 1:1). The word *Christos* (*Messiah* in Aramaic) means “the anointed one”. It initially referred to the anointing of a king who is appointed by God (King David for example). O’Collins here indicates that “by the ritual act of anointing, OT kings were installed, for example: Saul (1Sam10:1), David (2Sam2:4, 5:3) and Solomon (1Kings 1:34). Hence the king could be called the ‘Lord’s anointed.’”⁴²³ O’Collins adds that this practice of

⁴²² James, D. G. Dunn. *New Testament Theology: An Introduction*. 2009, p59

⁴²³ Gerald O’Collins. *Christology: A Biblical, Historical and Systematic Study of Jesus*. 2009, p24

anointing kings was later extended to the anointing of Aaronic priesthood; and also to the prophets, though there was no actual rite of anointing for the prophets.⁴²⁴ However, with time, the term became linked to the expectations of a kingly *Messiah* who would liberate Israel from foreign domination.⁴²⁵

From its political context, the concept soon took on a more religious meaning in connection with the establishment of the “kingdom of God”. As Dermot Lane puts it, “in time, God’s promises became centred around the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. The leading figure here was the *Messiah* who would be associated with the setting up of the kingdom of God”.⁴²⁶ Establishing this kingdom of God no longer entails waging wars of conquests, but leading people to seek repentance and forgiveness of sins. Here, the enemy would no longer be a foreign power but sin. As *Messiah*, Jesus’ role would be to save “fallen humanity” from the tyranny of sin and death. Thus, Jesus’ particular interest in preaching the reign or the kingdom of God, together with the miracles that accompanied his teachings convinced his disciples that he was the expected *Messiah*.

O’Collins does not hesitate to add that while the miracles and wondrous deeds Jesus performed helped the first Christians to identify Jesus as the promised *Messiah*, Jesus himself also interpreted his person and activities messianically; in an unregal and unwarlike fashion.⁴²⁷ So, if Mark ascribes the title *Messiah* to Jesus, then he was simply expressing the experience of the first Christian community, of which he was constitutively part. Besides, the events of Jesus’ baptism and transfiguration in which the voice from heaven calls Jesus “my beloved son” (1:11 and 9:7) goes to confirm the close link between Jesus’ messianism and his identity as the “Son of God”. So in Mk 1:16 – 8:26, Mark then sets out to demonstrate to his readers, the truth about Jesus as the *Messiah*, the Son of God. If Jesus performs miracles and wonders, then it is as a consequence of his being the *Messiah*, the Son of God.

⁴²⁴ O’Collins. *Christology*. 2009, p25

⁴²⁵ According to O’Collins, the rule of Yahweh is revealed in the rule of this messianic Davidic king who is also symbolized in the “one like the son of man.” (Ibid, p27, 25-28)

⁴²⁶ Dermot Lane. *The Reality of Jesus*. 1975, p13

⁴²⁷ O’Collins. *Christology*. 2009, p27

In this way, the reader soon discovers that after Jesus' announcement of the imminence of "the kingdom of God" and the calling of some disciples, what immediately follows in succession are exorcisms, healings and the show of supernatural authority. Here, one finds the *Messiah*, the Son of God seriously at work by delivering the man with the unclean spirit (1:21ff), the healing of Simon's mother in-law (1:29ff), other healings in Galilee (1:35ff), the cleansing of the leper (1:40ff), the healing of the paralytic (2:1ff) and the man with the withered hand (3:1ff), the calming of the storm (4:35ff), the deliverance of the Gerasene demoniac (5:1ff), raising of Ja'irus' daughter back to life (5:21ff), the feeding of the five thousand (6:30ff), walking on the sea (6:45ff), the deliverance of the little girl with the unclean spirit (7:24ff), the cure of the deaf man (7:31ff), feeding the four thousand (8:1ff) and the cure of the blind man (8:22ff).

These spectacular events by themselves evoked significant questions and responses on the part of the people who experienced or witnessed them. According to Hooker, "the events affect those who observe them with terror (4:41), amazement (5:20) and astonishment (5:42), for they can find no answer to the question posed in 4:41 'who can this be?'"⁴²⁸ The expressions: "what is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even unclean spirits and they obey him" (1:7), "we have never seen anything like this" (2:12), "who then is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?" (4:41) and so forth,⁴²⁹ somehow point to the extraordinariness of Jesus. The people's amazement and acknowledgement of Jesus' supernatural powers seem to point to the work of the *Messiah* whose picture Mark seeks to accentuate. Thus, Donald English could say that Mark's "picture of the *Messiah* is made even more compelling by the demonstration, beyond words of preaching, in the miracles Jesus performed".⁴³⁰

In effect, it could be said that Mark's reference to Jesus as the "Son of God" is not to be taken literally as the physical generation of a son, but as establishing the intimate relationship which existed between God and Jesus Christ. As Dunn pointed out, "when Christianity came to grapple with defining Jesus' relationship with God, it was son of the

⁴²⁸ Morna D. Hooker. "Who Can This Be?" 2005, p88-89.

⁴²⁹ For Morna Hooker, the stilling of the storm presents us with Jesus' extraordinary authority. He controls not only the wind and the waves (4:35-41), but also the whole legion of unclean spirits who addresses him as 'son of the most high God' (5:7). (See Morna D. Hooker. "Who Can This Be?" 2005, p88)

⁴³⁰ Donald English. *The Message of Mark: The Mystery of Faith*. 1992, p16

Father that emerged as the consensus way of doing so”.⁴³¹ The reasons being that: first of all in the Gospels, Jesus expressed the relationship between himself and God in a “Father-son” kind of relationship. For instance, he prayed to God as “Abba Father” (Mk 14: 36) which is a language of family intimacy. Secondly, the designation “Son of God” was used by the early Christians in their prayers and liturgy which supported their conviction that by faith in Jesus, they too were sharing in the same sense of sonship that “Abba” expressed.⁴³² Thus, the notion of divine sonship is not literal in the sense of God begetting a son.⁴³³

The understanding of Jesus as the “Son of God” is perhaps one of the biggest stumbling block in Christian-Muslim dialogical relations. In Surah 6:101, the Qur’an says; “...how could He (God) have a son when He has no spouse, when he created all things and has full knowledge of all things?” In Surah 4:171, the Qur’an further says, “people of the Book; do not go to excess in your religion... God is only one God. He is far above having a son...”⁴³⁴ From these two texts and others, one gets the impression that the Qur’an perceives the Christian designation of Jesus as the “Son of God” in terms of physical generation – i.e. Christians believe that God has taken the Virgin Mary as His wife and somehow impregnated her, giving birth to His son Jesus Christ. But as we can see, when Christian theology conceives Jesus as the “Son of God”, this is viewed in a rather metaphorical sense which captures the special relationship which existed between Jesus and God. While this point will be further developed further in Chapter four, let us now turn to the meaning of the designation “Son of Man”.

4.2.1.3. Jesus Christ as the “Son of Man” in Mark (8:31 – 15:47)

The title “Son of Man” (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου) appears fourteen (14) times in Mark’s Gospel and out of these fourteen occasions, only two of these references (2:10-11 and 2:27-28) appear in the “Son of God” narrative section (1:16 – 8:26). The rest of the twelve references can only be located in the second section of the Gospel (8:31 – 15:47). As one would notice, “the Son of Man” sayings are presented in Mark and the other synoptic Gospels as the title Jesus constantly applied in his self-reference. In Mark, these sayings

⁴³¹ James, D. G Dunn. *New Testament Theology*. 2009, p58

⁴³² Ibid, p58-59

⁴³³ Oscar Cullmann. *The Christology of the New Testament*. 1963, p276

⁴³⁴ M.A.S. Abdel Haleem. *The Qur’an: A New Translation*. 2010

appear to gain their frequency and density immediately after knowing the views of the disciples concerning his identity: “who do people say I am?” (8:27-30). The responses from the people (8:28) and Peter’s confession (8:29) offered Jesus the hint at least to the minimum, that the people associated his work and mission to God. As Donald English puts it, Caesarea Philippi was for Jesus, a turning point in his ministry and Peter’s confession, a high point in the revelation of his identity.⁴³⁵ For Morna Hooker, “Mark’s careful ordering of the material makes it clear that Peter’s declaration at Caesarea Philippi marks a breakthrough in the disciples understanding. For in contrast to those who, like Herod, think of Jesus as a prophet, Peter acknowledges Jesus to be ‘the *Messiah*.’”⁴³⁶

Consequently, Donald English asserted that after Peter’s breakthrough, “the Master would from now on, concentrate increasingly on the preparation of the disciples on what lay ahead”⁴³⁷ i.e. the paschal mystery (the suffering, death and resurrection) – which would later give definitive meaning to Jesus’ identity and mission. Here, we would argue that Mark’s use of “the Son of Man” sayings in the second part of the Gospel inaugurates and brings to the fore, the humanity of Jesus as the “suffering servant” who redeems by dying and rising from the death. But the question is: what is the meaning and significance of the “Son of Man” title in Mark and how does it contribute to the understanding of Mark’s Christology?

There are various disputed views as to what the title “Son of Man” frequently used by Jesus as a self-designation really means. For instance, Brown reports that while Géza Vermes argues that from the Aramaic Targums, “Son of Man” was used as a circumlocution for ‘I,’ Barnabas Lindars thinks that the “Son of Man” title is used to mean “a man such as I or a man in my position”.⁴³⁸ In Jack Kingsbury’s view, the title is without content as far as the identity of Jesus is concerned. Kingsbury attributes this to the fact that Jesus’ references to himself as the “Son of Man” does not break the secret of his identity. Thus, the title only functions as a “public title” by means of which Jesus’ referred to himself in the world. As a result, its meaning in Mark’s story captures the force of “this

⁴³⁵ Donald English. *The Message of Mark: The Mystery of Faith*. 1992, p159

⁴³⁶ Morna D. Hooker. “Who Can This Be?” 2005, p90

⁴³⁷ Donald English. *The Message of Mark: The Mystery of Faith*. 1992, p159

⁴³⁸ Raymond Brown. *Introduction to New Testament Christology*. 1994, p97-98.

man” or “this human being”.⁴³⁹ For James Dunn however, when seen in such ordinary sense as in the case of G. Vermes, B. Lindars and Jack Kingsbury, “Son of Man” does not seem to carry great theological or christological implications.⁴⁴⁰ However, it might convey a sense deeper than its force as “this man” or “this human being”.

For Oscar Cullmann, the self-designation of Jesus as the “Son of Man” points to two categories of meaning: firstly, it points to the eschatological work that Jesus must fulfil in the future and secondly, it applies to his earthly task. The *eschatological application* represents a pronounced statement of majesty which corresponds to the Jewish view expressed in the OT, especially in Daniel 7:13-14. His primary function here is that of judgement. The *earthly application* relates to his incarnation and ministry which in themselves inaugurate the future eschatological experience. In this earthly task, his primary role is that of the suffering servant of God.⁴⁴¹ Cullmann’s double sense proposition (eschatological work and earthly task) makes one wonder whether the views of Lindars, Vermes and Kingsbury are untenable. This is because its association to Jesus’ suffering, death, resurrection and to the future glory of the kingdom of God gives the title a deeper meaning. Thus, one could say that the Markan use of the title captures Mark’s attempt to acknowledge that Jesus, who is “the Christ, the Son of God”, is also a human being defined by his susceptibility to suffering and death like all other human beings. But unlike all other human beings, he will rise from the dead. Let us see how some texts in the OT help us understand Mark’s use of the title.

In the OT, while the title “Son of Man” in Ps 8:5 refers to an ordinary human being,⁴⁴² in Ezekiel 2:1, 3:1, 4:1, 5:1, it is used as a title for the prophet. However, in Daniel 7:13-14, it refers to a heavenly exalted figure who receives authority, glory and sovereign power. This exalted heavenly figure in Daniel, described as “one like the Son of Man” would be worshipped by all peoples and nations. His dominion is said to be everlasting and his kingdom is never to be destroyed. According to O’Collins, this image

⁴³⁹ Jack D. Kingsbury. *The Christology of Mark’s Gospel*. 1983, p159

⁴⁴⁰ James, D. G. Dunn. *New Testament Theology: An Introduction*. 2009, p57

⁴⁴¹ Oscar Cullmann. *The Christology of the New Testament*. 1963, p155-164

⁴⁴² For Dunn, if understood as an Aramaic idiom, the title “son of man” designates that which is characteristic of humankind. From this perspective, the phrase carries no christological or theological implications (James, D. G. Dunn. *New Testament Theology: An Introduction*. 2009, p57)

of the “one like the Son of Man” in Daniel 7:13-14 could refer to the angels and/or the righteous and persecuted Jews who would be vindicated and given authority by God (Daniel 7:18, 21-22).⁴⁴³ However, in its usage in the Gospels as the self-designation of Jesus, the title draws in new contexts, meanings and implications. As his self-designation, Jesus used the title in three ways: (a) in his earthly work and its humble condition (Mk 2:10); (b) in his impending suffering, death and resurrection (Mk 9:9); (c) in his future coming in heavenly glory to act with sovereign power at the final judgement (Mk 8:38).⁴⁴⁴

Following O’Collins view, if the “one like the Son of Man” in Daniel 7 reflects some apocalyptic messianic interpretations, then it suggests that Mark’s identification of Jesus as “the *Messiah*” in the prologue (1:1) needs no further elucidation. Should one even argue that the “one like the Son of Man” in Daniel does not represent a heavenly individual figure, then the question would be: does the meaning associated to Daniel 7:13-14 prevent Jesus from taking an inherited expression and massively using it in his own way? The “Son of Man” title was Jesus’ own way of identifying himself.⁴⁴⁵

Consequently, when one relates Mk 1:1 to the title “Son of Man”, one sees clearly the story Mark sought to share with his readers i.e. Mark wanted his readers to know that Jesus, who is the “the *Messiah*, the Son of God” walked the face of the earth as a human being (the Son of Man). He is not an abstract concept or a myth. Thus, it represents Mark’s way of telling his later readers that “the Son of God” walked the face of the earth as “the Son of Man” and this was demonstrated by his susceptibility to death and his power to rise from the dead on the third day, as he himself predicted.

In Mark’s particular style, his “Son of Man” motif first of all fulfils his literary style (the messianic secrecy) which we shall take up in the succeeding section. Secondly, it also demonstrates how Gentiles (who form part of Mark’s readers) could come to know and believe in the true identity of Jesus as “the Son of God”. This is shown from the example of the Centurion (a Gentile), at the foot of the cross, who affirms Jesus’ divinity: “truly, this man is the Son of God” (Mk 15:39), in the same way that God Himself

⁴⁴³ O’Collins. *Christology*. 2009, p62

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid, p63

⁴⁴⁵ O’Collins. *Christology*. 2009, p64-67.

affirmed this at the beginning of the story (Mk 1:11). Thus, Peter's confession may be the high point of Mark's Christology, but the centurion's confession further demonstrates the depths of faith which Gentiles are capable of attaining in their believe in God. So, while Jesus is misunderstood, rejected and abandoned to die on the cross, even by his closest disciples, one man, a Gentile, still saw God in him (Mk 15:39).

4.2.2. The Significance of the "Son of God" and "Son of Man" Motif

First of all, we indicated that the opening lines of Mark's prologue (1:1) betrayed his authorial intent. Whereas one can already find the christological titles of "*Messiah*" and "the Son of God" in this verse, its meaning, as a whole, makes it the foundational construct from which every chapter and verse is a further development. Thus, the recognition that the "Gospel" is about no other person but Jesus "the Christ", "the Son of God" is very significant for Mark. In Mk 1:2-3, Mark draws continuity between Jesus, "*the Messiah*" and the work of God in the past, as can be found in Isaiah 40:3 – "a voice cries in the wilderness, prepare a way for our God". By presenting Jesus as the fulfilment of the prophecies of Isaiah, Jesus is undoubtedly identified by Mark as the *Messiah* who fulfils the OT hopes (see 2Samuel 7:12-16). Secondly, the figure of John the Baptist and the "voice from heaven" further confirm this claim. But how does the "Son of God" and "Son of Man" motif help in shaping the identity and mission of Jesus in Mark's Gospel?

When one considers the context of Mk 8:29-30, one realises that it presents a dual play which consists of Peter's confession (8:29) and Jesus' response to it – "tell no one about this" (8:30). This call to silence about his identity which Peter divulged, immediately leads to Jesus' statement that "the Son of Man" must suffer and die, but would rise on the third day (8:31). So, we could deduce that in this pericope of Mark (8:29-30), Jesus acknowledges his Messianism by his affirmative silence⁴⁴⁶ on the matter and his request that they tell no one about it (Mk 8:30). Convinced that his disciples now know who he is, Mark proceeds to tell his readers the ultimate earthly task that Jesus still had to fulfil i.e. his suffering and death which would show forth his second nature, his humanity expressed in "the Son of Man" motif (Mk 8:31). That is, since suffering and death are by nature

⁴⁴⁶ We take "affirmative silence" here to mean a silence which is judged to be neither neutral nor disapproving, but one which consents to a popular claim.

human experiences, Jesus, who is also human, will equally experience these human realities. Only by virtue of his being divine (the Son of God), will Jesus, unlike all other humans, rise from death on the third day. So, in considering the use of the two titles in the Gospel, one gets the impression that Mark sought to communicate to his readers the message that: “Jesus Christ, the Son of God” can only fully be understood in the light of his identity also as the “Son of Man”.

Though this appears to be plausible considering the arguments put forward so far, it is worthwhile to note that some scholars have identified and presented other reasons as the significance of Mark’s use of these titles in his Christology. Some of these reasons include: (a) Mark’s intention to correct an erroneous understanding of the *Messiah* at the time and (b) to present his story of Jesus Christ as a call to *discipleship*. As a *corrective Christology*, some scholars agree that Mark’s use of the two titles was in his interest to correct an erroneous understanding of the identity of Jesus Christ in the early Church.⁴⁴⁷ For Perrin, Mark sought to “teach the Christians of his day a true Christology in place of the false Christology that he felt they were in danger of accepting”.⁴⁴⁸ He achieved this through his unique style called the *Messianic secrecy*⁴⁴⁹ which rests between two poles of early Christian thoughts. One pole expressed the Christian belief that Jesus first became the *Messiah* only after the resurrection (e.g. Acts 2:36; Rom 1:4; Phil2:6-11). The other pole conceives that Jesus’ *messianism* is pre-existent in terms expressed in the Johannine Gospel (1:1-5).

The contest between these two poles of Christological thought created an unhealthy tension in the early Church. Hence, in Wrede’s view, Mark diffuses this tension by situating his Christology between the two poles and welding them together.⁴⁵⁰ Thus, while Mark portrays Jesus as the *Messiah* in the prologue (1:1), he is also under the influence of the early Christian view on the post-resurrection experience of Jesus as the Christ of God. This makes Mark portray Jesus as keeping his messianic secret⁴⁵¹ as is demonstrated by

⁴⁴⁷ Morna D. Hooker. “Who Can This Be?” 2005, p95

⁴⁴⁸ Norman Perrin. *A Modern Pilgrimage in New Testament Christology*. 1974, p92-93

⁴⁴⁹ William Wrede is said to be the originator of the theory of the *Messianic secret* (Jack D. Kingsbury. *The Christology of Mark’s Gospel*. 1983, p2-33)

⁴⁵⁰ Jack D. Kingsbury. *The Christology of Mark’s Gospel*. 1983, p3

⁴⁵¹ Ibid p2-3

Jesus' "commands of silence" to demons (1:25, 3:4, 3:12), to persons he heals (1:43-45; 5:43) and to the disciples (8:30, 9:9). In Morna Hooker's view, Mark's use of the messianic secret also serves to explain why Israel failed to recognize Jesus as "the *Messiah*". 'It serves as a pointer to the truth about Jesus' identity which so many people failed to grasp. This truth is spelt out for us at the beginning of the Gospel in the prologue (1:1), in the middle at the transfiguration (9:2-13) and at the end in the words of the centurion (15:39).' In this way, Mark seems to nudge his readers in the rib as if to say; "and you of course, because I have led you into the secret, would understand precisely what this means!"⁴⁵²

As a *call to discipleship*, Irenaeus of Lyon reports that after the martyrdom of Peter and Paul, "Mark the companion of Peter, transmitted to us in writing what was preached by Peter".⁴⁵³ Peter is said to have died around 65AD within the period of the persecution by Nero (64-67AD). If Irenaeus is right, then Mark's Gospel must have been written within this period of persecution (65-70AD). While these persecutions went on in Rome, there were other persecutions in Jerusalem occasioned by the failure of the Jewish revolt which led to the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem (70AD). Thus, we could reasonably say that the context within which Mark wrote his Gospel was one of persecution, probably written for Roman readers (Gentile Christians). If his readers experienced persecution, then Mark's work was a radical call to discipleship shaped by the story of "Jesus Christ, the Son of God" and "the Son of Man". As "the Son of God", Jesus has power and authority over the forces of nature and evil. But as the "the Son of Man", his mission also involved suffering, dying and rising from the dead in obedience to the Father. Thus, Mark's audience who experience persecution now may be given the hope and confidence that like Jesus, they too would experience future glory and victory as persecuted believers.

In consequence, it must be emphasized that the Christology of Mark's Gospel can only be located in his purpose, discerned by reading "Mark's own expression of purpose

⁴⁵² Morna Hooker. "Who Can this be? 2005, p98

⁴⁵³ See Irenaeus: *Against Heresies*. 3:1:3

<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/augustine/arch/irenaeus/advhaer3.txt> (15/01/2013)

wherever he has tried to make it plain”.⁴⁵⁴ While one finds this in the first thirteen verses of the prologue, the rest of the narrative, which is a progressive development of the prologue, takes on a two-tier question framework: i.e. who is Jesus and how should the reader respond to him? Mark relies on his unique style of the *messianic secret* which involves the dialectic interplay of the two christological titles to respond to the above questions. We did argue that by the criteria of density, the two titles divide the main narrative into two parts: 1:14 – 8:26 and 8:31 – 15:47 – with Peter’s confession (8:27-30) being the watershed. Though divided into two parts, these two sections nonetheless constitute a composite narrative which adequately expresses the identity and mission of Jesus Christ. For Mark, Jesus is the Christ, “Son of God” who becomes the “Son of Man” in order to save fallen humanity.

It is this Christological construct which the Church would continue to clarify in the Christological debates leading to the councils of Nicaea, Chalcedon and beyond. As Alan Spence indicated, once there are evidences of the attempts to conceptually pair the divinity and humanity of Jesus in Christian faith and theology, “the church finds itself facing, even as it continues to face today, a whole host of complex and baffling questions about his person”,⁴⁵⁵ to which she must make appropriate theological responses. Here, the theological task lies in “providing a coherent theological explanation of Jesus’ person in harmony with the scriptural testimony, which is able to account for his role in its worship and faith”.⁴⁵⁶ As Walter Kasper puts it, within Christian theology therefore, “when we say that Jesus is the Christ, we maintain that this unique, irreplaceable Jesus of Nazareth is at one and the same time the Christ sent by God”.⁴⁵⁷ In other words, as the Christ, Jesus is viewed as the saviour of the world and the eschatological fulfilment of history. So, the confession that “Jesus is the Christ is the basic statement of Christian belief and Christology is no more than the conscientious elucidation of that proposition”.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁴ As Morna Hooker intimated, “Mark’s story about Jesus is full of christological significance, a significance sometimes expressed clearly, but more often only suggested by allusions, hints and the juxtaposition of his material.” (Morna Hooker. “Who Can this be? 2005, p87)

⁴⁵⁵ Alan Spence. *Christology: A Guide for the Perplexed*. 2008, p6

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid, p6

⁴⁵⁷ Walter Kasper. *Jesus the Christ*. 1977, p15.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid, p15

Jesus' identity as the "Son of God" and the "Son of Man" must always be at the heart of Christian faith and theology. Christian theology may be challenged to make this conceptual pairing (Son of God and Son of Man) comprehensible to the contemporary mind, but this does not entail replacing this tradition-specific conceptions (the two nature Christology) with some revisionary Christologies. For Walter Kasper, the Church's effort to make Christology relevant to contemporary context poses a theological problematic. On the one hand, if the Church must preserve her identity by articulating her doctrines unambiguously in straightforward terms, she risks the loss of relevance. Yet on the other hand, if she struggles for relevance; she may end up forfeiting her identity.⁴⁵⁹ So, the way out of this impasse is for the Church to undergo profound reflections on her real basis, mission and significance in the world. Since the Church does not find her basis and mission in ideas, principles, programmes, moral or doctrinal injunctions, but on a person with a specific name – Jesus Christ,⁴⁶⁰ Christian theology must never lose sight of its task of articulating his identity and mission in fidelity to the scriptural testimonies which Mark for instance, makes plain.

In the nutshell, a Christian-tradition-specific understanding of the identity and mission of Jesus Christ must reflect what Christian faith and theology has to say about Jesus. From the synoptic Gospels, Mark tells us that Jesus Christ is the "Son of God" and the "Son of Man" and constitutive saviour of the world. Though there were other opinions to the contrary in response to Jesus' question – "who do people say I am and who do you say I am?" it was Peter's response which received Jesus' approval and commendation.⁴⁶¹ Hence, Christian faith and theology must never lose sight of this inherited faith or traditions. After all, "if tradition means the passing on of that which has been received, tradition is not bad. Quite the contrary, it is necessary in order for continuity to be preserved".⁴⁶² Though Christian faith and theology is called upon to make tradition relevant to contemporary situations, it must remain committed to the traditions from which it was formed and founded.

⁴⁵⁹ Walter Kasper. *Jesus the Christ*. 1977, p15

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid, p15

⁴⁶¹ See Mathew 16:17-18

⁴⁶² Hans Schwarz. *Christology*. 1998, p137

In chapter three, we asserted that commitment, openness, respect and equality together constitute the kind of dispositions that make constructive dialogues possible. In dialogue as an exercise in learning, the Christian dialogical partner must be convinced of and thus capable of articulating an authentic Christian understanding of the identity and mission of Jesus Christ as it pertains to Christian faith and theology. By this, we mean that one must be committed to the two-nature Christology which defines the identity of Jesus Christ within the context of his role as saviour of the world. This is significant for the success of dialogue as an exercise in learning from and about the other. However, while exercising this aspect of commitment to the home tradition, the Christian party is also called upon to be open to what Muslims have to say about Jesus in their tradition-specific contexts. Hence, what follows below is Christology from an Islamic perspective.

4.3. The Tradition-Specific Understanding of Christology in Islam

In the preceding section, one gets the impression that Christology connotes a Christian theological articulation of the identity and mission of Jesus Christ, particularly on how Jesus' divinity and humanity are articulated within the same person as the saviour of the world. So, the question then is: if Christology is essentially part of Christian theology, can the notion of an "Islamic Christology" be theologically justified? If yes, what is the ground for such a Christology? Although it is true that the Qur'an, the *Hadiths* and the *Tafsir* literature present Jesus Christ as a prophet of Allah, a human being without any divine attribution, Jesus is nonetheless highly respected in Islam and is given greater mention with honorific titles in the Qur'an than any of the prophets who preceded him.⁴⁶³

Parrinder affirms that the name *Isa* (Jesus) occurs twenty-five times in the Qur'an and by combining this name with titles such as *Messiah* and Son of Mary in the Qur'an, "Jesus is spoken of some thirty-five times".⁴⁶⁴ From these references to Jesus in the Qur'an one finds that the Qur'an itself contains narratives about Jesus Christ who occupies a central place in Christian faith and theology. The Qur'an provides answers as to who Jesus was, how he came to be and his mission. Thus, if Christology concerns the study of Jesus Christ in respect of his identity and mission, then Islam also has the resources that provide

⁴⁶³ Geoffrey. Parrinder. *Jesus in the Qur'an*. 1965, p16

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid, p18

for this study within its own religious context. Hence an “Islamic Christology” focuses on the Islamic understanding of the identity and role played by Jesus the Christ in the divine plan of Allah.

It is from this perspective that Mahmoud Ayoub and other scholars define Islamic Christology as “an understanding of the role of Christ within the divine plan of human history, of Christ the man, one of the servants of God, but also of Christ, the Word of God, His Spirit and exalted friend”.⁴⁶⁵ According to Ayoub, these ideas are clearly stated in the Qur’an and therefore represent the framework within which an Islamic view about Jesus can be conceptualized. Whereas these views are in stark contra-distinction from the Christian tradition-specific understanding of Jesus Christ, the conception that Jesus is a prophet of Allah represents the authentic Islamic understanding of him. Thus, the story that Islam has to share about who Jesus is and the mission he fulfilled is the justifiable ground for an “Islamic Christology”.

However, before delving into the issues that concern this christological category, it is worthwhile to draw attention to the interest and focus of this section on Islamic Christology. Since the purpose of this section is to develop a Christology that is uniquely Islamic, it will focus on identifying the prophetic role of Jesus within the context of the Qur’an and the Hadiths in the light of the overall Islamic conception of God, humanity and the world. From this standpoint, while Jesus would be identified as a prophet of Allah, we would seek to answer the questions – how did Jesus fulfil this role as prophet and, in what ways does he provide guidance to humanity in its response to God?

We will start this section by firstly focusing on the theological framework within which an “Islamic Christology” can be situated. Here, we shall argue that the fundamental Islamic faith principle on the obligation to the *Tawhid* (the Oneness of God) defines and shapes the Islamic theological comprehension of the identity and mission of the “*Messiah*, Jesus, son of Mary” (Surah 4:171). Secondly, since Islamic Christology is predominantly centred on Jesus as a prophet, we shall focus on investigating the concept of prophecy in Islam, the role played by the prophets of Allah and the significant role Jesus plays within

⁴⁶⁵ Irfan Omar (editor). *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue by Mahmoud Ayoub*. 2007, p134

this context. Until then, let us briefly delve into the meaning of Islam and how the *Tawhid* contributes to defining the theological context for understanding Islamic Christology.

The word “Islam” comes from the Arabic word (al-’islām) which literally means “to surrender or to submit”. In a religious sense, it means the “submission or surrender of oneself to Allah (God)”.⁴⁶⁶ Murata and Chittick point out that “islam” carries a double-connotation: the universal and the particular sense. From the universal sense, *islam* means “‘submission to God’ as an undeniable fact of existence”.⁴⁶⁷ This means that since God is the creator and sustainer of the universe, creation only functions properly if it submits itself to the will of the creator (God).⁴⁶⁸ Hence, from this universal perspective, every person who submits himself/herself to God is considered a *muslim*. It is from this perspective that the Qur’an identifies Adam, Abraham, Jacob, Moses (Surah 2:131-133) and the disciples of Jesus as *muslims* (Surah 5:111).⁴⁶⁹ However, with the particular sense of the word, *islam* refers to the specific religion established by Allah through the Prophet Muhammad.

Hence, from the universal and particular senses of the word, we could surmise that the word *islam* implies four basic meanings: (1) the submission of the whole of creation to God; (2) the submission of humanity to God through the guidance of His prophets; (3) the submission of humanity to Allah through the guidance of His Prophet Muhammad and (4) the submission of the followers of Muhammad to the will of Allah. Within these four facets of meaning, the last two senses of the word properly refer to Islam as with the uppercase I as a religion.

From the context of the *Hadith of Gabriel* which concerns the discourse between Muhammad and the Angel Gabriel who assesses Muhammad’s understanding about the three dimensions of Islam; scholars tend to divide the religious beliefs of Islam into three dimensions: that is, *islam* (submission), *iman* (Faith) and *ihsan* (perfection or excellence). These dimensions sum up its religious worldview. It must be said here that the use of the word dimension is a heuristic device intended for a better understanding of Islam as a complex religious structure. To understand this complex structure theologically, one needs

⁴⁶⁶ Badru Kateregga & David Shenk. *Islam and Christianity: A Muslim and a Christian in Dialogue*. 1980, p1

⁴⁶⁷ Sachiko Murata & Williams C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. 1994, p3

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid, p3

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid, p4

to approach it from its different parts (*islam, iman* and *ihsan*), aware that it is the overall constitution of these parts that truly define the religion. Thus, the use of dimension is an attempt to understand the religion as a whole in respect of its different aspects and the different aspects within the context of the whole. As Murata and Chittick puts it, the parts are “separated only to suggest that they fit together as a whole”.⁴⁷⁰

In the discourse between Muhammad and the Angel Gabriel, Gabriel “cross-examines” the prophet about his comprehension of the message of the Qur’an. This cross-examination is found in the *Hadith Jibril*. The aspects of the Hadith which concern these three dimensions read as follows:

“Umar ibn al-khattab said: One day when we were with God’s messenger, a man with very white clothing and very black hair came up to us. No mark of travel was visible on him and none of us recognize him. Sitting down before the Prophet, leaning his knees against his and placing his hands on his thighs, he said, ‘Tell me, Muhammad about submission.’

He replied, ‘Submission means that you should bear witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is God’s Messenger, that you should perform the ritual prayer, pay the alms tax, fast during Ramadan and make the pilgrimage to the house if you are able to go there.’ The man said, ‘you have spoken the truth.’ He said, ‘Now tell me about faith.’

He replied, ‘Faith means that you have faith in God, his angels, his books, his messengers and the last day and that you have faith in the measuring out, both its good and its evil.’ Remarking that he had spoken the truth, he then said, ‘Now tell me about doing what is beautiful.’

He replied, ‘Doing what is beautiful means that you should worship God as if you see him, for even if you do not see him, He sees you’”.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁷⁰ Sachiko Murata & Williams c. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. 1994, xxxii

⁴⁷¹ Sachiko Murata & Williams Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. 1994, xxv

In this hadith, *islam* as the first dimension consists of the confession of the *Shahada*, observing the *Salat*, the *Zakat*, *Ramadan* and *Hajj*. In other words, the first dimension relates to practice. It asks the question “what do Muslims do?” In response, Muslims are supposed to submit themselves to the one and true God (the *Tawhid*). This form of religious monotheism makes the *Shahada* the most fundamental faith principle in Islamic religiosity. If Muslims see Jesus as the prophet of Allah, this would be theologically justified within the context of the *Tawhid*. The second dimension (*iman*) focuses on the faith of the Muslim. From Muhammad’s response to the Angel Gabriel, “Faith means that you have faith in God, his Angels, his Books, his Messengers and the Last Day and that you have faith in the Measuring Out, both its good and its evil.”⁴⁷² Within these six articles of faith, it is the *Tawhid* which gives meaning to them because the rest of the other articles find their relevance in the light of God’s oneness. The third dimension (*ihsan*) focuses on the translation of one’s faith into good deeds and action. *Ihsan* is used in the Qur’an as an action verb which means; “to do what is beautiful and good, to do something well, to do something perfectly, to gain perfection and virtuous qualities”.⁴⁷³ Here, perfection and virtuous qualities are measured by one’s degree of commitment to the one God.

Consequently, while *islam* directs one to the right practice of faith, *iman* focuses on faith and the understanding of it. *Ihsan* however, is a call to perfection and excellence; a sense of virtuous living informed by the religious convictions derived from *islam* and *iman*. All these dimensions make no sense if they are devoid of the obligation to the *Tawhid*. As we mentioned earlier, these dimension only represent the different aspects of Islam as a religion; for, the more a person harmoniously integrates faith, works and perfection, the closer the person is drawn to the life of submission to the will of Allah. In short, the emphasis is that Islamic Christology finds its tradition-specific meaning in the light of the *Tawhid*. What precisely is the *Tawhid* and how does it determine the understanding of Islamic Christology?

⁴⁷² Ibid, xxv

⁴⁷³ Williams C. Chittick. *Faith and Practice of Islam: Three Thirteenth Century Sufi Text*. 1992, p5

4.3.1. Islamic Christology in the light of the *Tawhid*

The word *Tawhid* has its Arabic roots from *wahid* which means “God is one”. Hence, *Tawhid* takes on the meaning of “recognizing and acknowledging that God is One”. It is “‘the assertion of divine unity’ or ‘the declaration of God’s oneness.’”⁴⁷⁴ This oneness of God is expressed in the first part of the Shahada which states that “there is no god but God”. God here is seen as the creator and sustainer of everything that exists. Thus, the confession that “there is no god but one God” (Surah 5:73) underscores Islamic monotheism where Allah remains the transcendent Being who is the creator and source of everything in the world. He created the world in order that creation would submit to Him, by living according to His plan as the “master designer”. For God himself said in the Qur’an: “There is no god but I, so worship me” (Surah 21:25). The Qur’an further emphasizes that “God himself bears witness that there is no god but Him and so do the Angels and those who have knowledge” (Surah 3:18).

As the creator and sustainer of the universe, Allah created everything for a purpose. He created humanity for the purpose of worshipping Him alone and being vicegerents to the rest of His creation. Consequently, to worship Allah alone is to have fundamentally fulfilled the purpose for one’s creation. Thus, Muslims view that all the prophets of Allah including Jesus, provided guidance in respect of the observance of the *Tawhid* – “there is no god but I. So worship me” (Surah 21:25). Worship here captures the sense of the total submission of the believer to Allah i.e. following what Allah commands through the guidance of His prophets. To submit oneself to anything apart from Allah is to follow misguidance.

Thus, the statement “there is no god but God” (Surah 5:73; 4: 171) means that all gods whom people worship other than Allah are false: an act which is vehemently condemned in the Qur’an as *Shirk*. Here, *shirk* means to give God Partners or worship others along with God or exclusive of God.⁴⁷⁵ This act is condemned in the Qur’an (see Surah 4:36, 31:13, 6:19 and 13:36). So, *shirk* is nothing but the opposite of the *Tawhid*.

⁴⁷⁴ Sachiko Murata & Williams C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. 1994, p43

⁴⁷⁵ *Shirk* is not just the question of worshipping idols or physical objects. It also consists of following one’s own opinions and feelings apart from the message of Allah (Ibid, p49-50)

The *Tawhid* is the first principle and pillar of Islamic faith. Consequently, the emphasis on the avoidance of “associating others with God” forms a central tenet of Islamic faith understanding: to associate others with Allah would be to destroy the very foundations on which Islam rests. This, therefore, explains why *shirk* is viewed as a serious sin – “if someone associates any other with God, God would prohibit paradise to him” (Surah 5:72).

For Islam therefore, humanity was created to know that “there is no god but God” and so to worship only Allah. Hence the *Tawhid* lies within human nature (*fitra*). Since the purpose of humanity is to worship only Allah, Allah sent His messengers to help humanity fulfil this purpose. So, to associate others with Allah is to go against the most fundamental instincts of the human species. It is, so to speak, “to betray human nature and even leave the domain of human existence”.⁴⁷⁶ The *Tawhid* therefore leaves no room for any Islamic theologizing about God outside the confines of strict monotheism.

It is in the light of this faith principle (the *Tawhid*) that Jesus is understood as only a prophet of Allah. As a prophet of Allah *vis-a-vis* the rest of the other line of prophets, the Qur’an describes Jesus as the “closest friend of Allah” (Surah 3:45), “His Word directed to Mary and a Spirit from Him” (Surah 4:171). Christological titles such as Word of/from Allah, Spirit of Allah and *Messiah* resonate in Christian Christological discourses. The tendency, therefore, is to read Christian meanings into these titles thereby concluding that the ascription of these titles to Jesus in the Qur’an is an inevitable admission of Jesus’ divinity. For Islamic faith and theology, these honorific titles mean nothing more than that Jesus, the *Messiah*, is a prophet of Allah.

Unlike Christianity which conceived God within the context of the Holy Trinity (three persons one God), Islam does not permit such theological constructions or doctrinal definitions. Islam perceives any attempt to articulate the nature of Allah which departs from His Oneness and transcendence as misguidance. For Islam, the fundamental truth about God is that He is One – “Your God is but one. So submit to Him” (Surah 22:34). So, the oneness of God (the *Tawhid*) is a nonnegotiable aspect of the religion. Hence, when engaging Muslims in dialogue, one must be aware of this aspect of the faith and respect the

⁴⁷⁶ Sachiko Murata & Williams C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. 1994, p50

views which emanate as a consequence of it. However, how did the prophets function within the context of this divine unity?

4.3.2. Prophets, Messengers and Prophetic Guidance

While prophecy forms the second part of the Shahada (*Muhammadun rasul Allah*), giving it a more specific context, Muhammad identifies the prophets as constitutively part of the articles of faith in his reply to the Angel Gabriel concerning *iman* (faith). From this hadith, the Angel said to Muhammad, “Now tell me about faith. He replied. Faith means that you have faith in God, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers, the last day and the measuring out. Whereas the Angel commended Muhammad for getting it right, we can say that between the hadith of Gabriel and the second part of the Shahada is the play of the universality and particularity of prophecy within Islamic theology. But before we address this dialectic, let us first of all understand what “prophet” and “messenger” means in Islam.

The word “Prophet” comes from the Arabic word *nabi* which has two basic meanings: (1) to utter a word, a sound or to inform or give news, (2) to be elevated by God.⁴⁷⁷ For Murata and Chittick, both senses of the word *nabi*, reflect the Islamic understanding of the word prophet: since in Islam a prophet is a person who is chosen by God and given a message which may either be personal or for an intended audience or both. The Qur’an employs four words to qualify this task: *al-nabi* (Prophet), *rasul* (Messenger), *mursal* (Envoy) and *ulu’l-‘azm* (possessor of steadfastness). Whereas envoy and messenger may be synonymous; prophet, messenger and the possessor of steadfastness, have fine distinctions. These differences are that: the prophets are persons chosen by God with a message; they only “proclaim Allah’s news. They are not given Books”.⁴⁷⁸ The messengers however are the prophets who established religious communities, preserving their message in an oral or written scripture. Thus, whereas messengers are prophets, not all prophets are messengers.⁴⁷⁹ The possessors of

⁴⁷⁷ Sachiko Murata & Williams C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. 1994, p133

⁴⁷⁸ Kateregga, Badru, D. & Shenk, David, C. *Islam and Christianity*. 1980, p34

⁴⁷⁹ Mona Siddiqui. *Christians, Muslims & Jesus*. 2013, p12

steadfastness are the five messengers who established the major religions in history (namely, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad).⁴⁸⁰

It is relevant to note here that unlike Christianity, Islam admits Adam as the first prophet of Allah in successive line with the prophet Muhammad as the final prophet. The admission of Adam into the line of prophecy contributes significantly to shaping and differentiating the Islamic worldview of human nature, sin and redemption. These views are not the same as the Christian notion of “original sin” (contracted through the fall in Genesis 3:1-23) and the redemption which Jesus achieved through the Paschal Mystery. As Mona Siddiqui indicates, “perhaps this is Islam’s biggest parting with Christian doctrine in that it does not have those defining moments of both alienation from God as in the fall and subsequent reconciliation with God, redemption through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ”.⁴⁸¹ If Islam rejects the belief that Jesus died on the cross and that his death and resurrection have no soteriological significance, this would be directly influenced by its theology of human nature, sin and redemption. We deem that knowledge of this theological turn is very significant for a comparative theological exercise in Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology. Let us see how Adam, as the first prophet of Allah, sets the stage for a fundamental distinction between the Christian and Islamic theology of redemption and how this contributes in defining the prophetic role of Jesus.

4.3.2.1. Adam, Iblis and the Fall: the Question of Original Sin

The Qur’an, like the Judeo-Christian scriptures also presents Adam as the first human being to be created by God. In Qur’anic usage Adam stands for what it means to be human, the problem of human nature in keeping with the *Tawhid* and the reason for prophetic guidance to humanity. Murata and Chittick locate the Qur’anic use of the word *Trust* (Amana) as that which sums up the distinctive characteristics between humanity and the rest of creation (Surah 33:72).⁴⁸² *Trust* refers to the task of “Care-taking” or the human vocation to be vicegerents to the whole of creation. According to the Qur’an, this “care-taker” task was not only given to Adam but to all his descendants, who unanimously

⁴⁸⁰ Sachiko Murata & Williams C. Chittick. 1994, p134

⁴⁸¹ Mona Siddiqui. *Christians, Muslims & Jesus*. 2013, p218

⁴⁸² Sachiko Murata & Williams Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. 1994, p135

agreed to the divine injunction as they said; “Yes, we bear witness” to God as our Lord (Surah 7:172). This event is commonly called the “Covenant of Alast”,⁴⁸³ whereby humanity made a compact with God to acknowledge the *Tawhid*. This established an innate disposition in humanity to acknowledge the *Tawhid*. This innate disposition is often referred to as the *fitra*.⁴⁸⁴

However, the verse on *Trust* (Surah 33:72)⁴⁸⁵ concludes that the human being is “ignorant, a great wrongdoer”. For Murata and Chittick, this verse refers to the children of Adam who did not live up to the *Trust*. Though one might agree with this interpretation, it is rather plausible to trace the root of this “wrongdoing” also to the events leading to the Fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden (Surah 15:39-43). In this narrative, *Iblis* (Satan) is said to have previously disobeyed God (Surah 2:34 and 7:11-12) and was to be subjected to punishment (Surah 7:13). However, Iblis made a deal with God for the postponement of his punishment until the Day of Resurrection (Surah 7:14-15). This postponement seems to buy him time to attempt to lead all God’s loyal servants astray.⁴⁸⁶ According to the Qur’an God agrees to Iblis’ deal, aware that “Iblis shall have no authority over them, except those who choose to follow him” (Surah 15:43).

Now, the “choice to follow Iblis” in the above text demonstrates that although humanity has the innate disposition to acknowledge the *Tawhid* (*fitra*), God’s gift of *free will* to humanity also opens up the possibility of human disobedience to the divine will. Thus, the innate disposition to obey God (*fitra*) and the gift of free will constitute what it means to be truly human. As Murata and Chittick puts it, “to be human is to be faced with the choice between right and wrong, obedience and disobedience”.⁴⁸⁷ So one would see that in Surah 7:20, Iblis would lure Adam and Eve into disobedience to the divine command (Surah 7:19) leading to the Fall –Iblis said; “your Lord only forbade you this tree to prevent you from becoming angels and immortals”. Thus, Allah’s question “did I

⁴⁸³ “The Covenant of Alast” refers to a primordial covenant between each human being and God referred to in Surah 7:172 (Lakhani, Ali, M. *The Sacred Foundation of Justice in Islam*. 2006, p7)

⁴⁸⁴ Sachiko Murata & Williams C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. 1994, p137

⁴⁸⁵ “We offered the *Trust* to the heavens, and the Earth and the mountains, but they refused to carry it and were afraid of it. And the human beings carried it. Surely, he is very ignorant and a great wrongdoer.”

⁴⁸⁶ Surah 7:16-18

⁴⁸⁷ Sachiko Murata & Williams C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. 1994, p142

not prohibit you two from this tree?” (Surah 7:22), confirms that “Adam disobeyed his Lord” (Surah 20:121).

However, the immediate response of regret and repentance from Adam and Eve after the Fall is very significant here. It is said that “they were immediately shocked at what they had done and with one voice the two of them said, ‘we have wronged ourselves and unless you forgive us and have mercy on us, we shall surely be among the lost’” (Surah 7:23). From this act of repentance and the search for forgiveness, Adam and Eve were forgiven by Allah who restored them back to the state of “grace” so to speak – “Then Adam received some words from His Lord and He accepted his repentance” (Surah 2:37). Thus, Murata and Chittick indicate that the fundamental difference between Adam and Iblis’ disobedience lies in how each responded to God after the fall. “Whereas Iblis refused to admit that he had done something wrong by blaming God for leading him astray (Surah 7:16), Adam and Eve admitted their fault and asked God to forgive them”⁴⁸⁸ and Allah forgave them. So, within this story of the fall, we find two significant differences between the Islamic and the Christian accounts of the events.

First of all, within the Islamic context, the fall of Adam is not understood in the same way as the Christian doctrine of Original sin. For Christianity, the disobedience of Adam and Eve brought irrecoverable damnation on the human race. For instance, Christian theology asserts that “on account of their disobedience, human beings exist in a state of corruption from which they are unable to extricate themselves. If redemption is to take place, it must be on the basis of a new obedience on the part of humanity”.⁴⁸⁹ But since humanity is unable to break free from its entanglement to sin, it could only take God in Jesus Christ to set it free from this bond of sin, through Jesus’ death and resurrection.⁴⁹⁰ However, for Islam there is no such thing as Original sin, because God immediately forgave Adam and Eve for their disobedience when they sought for mercy (Surah 2:37). As the Qur’an confirms, God did not only forgive them, but “His Lord Chose him” (Surah 20:122).

⁴⁸⁸ Sachiko Murata & Williams C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. 1994, p145

⁴⁸⁹ Alister E. McGrath. *Christian Theology: An introduction*. 1997, p338

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid, p338

Consequently, Adam was made a true prophet of Allah and both he and Hauwa (Eve) were the first true Muslims.⁴⁹¹ If for Islam, Adam was forgiven by God and was made the first true Muslim, then there is no original sin. Without the concept of original sin, the notion of Jesus' death and resurrection as atonement for sin loses its soteriological pertinency. So the fall underscores God's divine power to restore His creation to normalcy without the need to suffer, die and resurrect in order to redeem. In Islam then, the significance of Jesus does not lie in "a death and resurrection as atonement for original sin" but in the role he played as a prophet of Allah providing guidance in the acknowledgement of the *Tawhid*.

Secondly, the "sending out" of Adam and Eve from the Garden is not seen within Islam as constituting a punishment from God for their transgressions. Within the Christian account, the departure from the Garden gives the impression that it is constitutively part of the consequences of the fall. So in Genesis 3:16-24, God said to the woman: because you have done this, "I will greatly multiply your pains in childbearing..." Then God said to the man: "because you have listened to your wife and have eaten of the tree... cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it..." The text then says that God subsequently drove the man and his wife out of the Garden of Eden and took measures to prevent them from coming back to the Garden again (Gen 3:22-24),

From the Qur'anic perspective, Adam was intended to be God's vicegerent to the "heavens and the earth and the mountains" (Surah 33:72). This explains why Allah thought him the names of all created reality (Surah 2:30-33). Hence, living in the Garden of Eden was therefore a preparatory process for his later job as the vicegerent of creation. Here, Murata and Chittick affirm that "God put Adam and Eve in the Garden so that they could gain strength for the hardships that would follow once they were placed at a great distance from Him, in the earth".⁴⁹² So, whereas in the Christian context, the separation from Eden is seen as part of the punishment meted out to Adam and Eve, for Islam, the separation is not a consequence of their sins, but a necessary act which commences Adam's task as God's vicegerent.

⁴⁹¹ Badru Kateregga. & David Shenk. *Islam and Christianity*. 1980, p16

⁴⁹² Sachiko Murata & Williams C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. 1994, p144

In consequence, Islam sees man as God's Khalifa on earth. Though it acknowledges that humanity is not perfect; for only Allah is perfect; it does not have the concept of original sin. The question of the free will of man and the continual presence of Iblis show that there is the human propensity for sin (understood as heedlessness or misguidance). If humanity is to accomplish its task of vicegerency and the acknowledgement of the *Tawhid*, then it would need the guidance of the prophets. It is for this reason that God in his kindness provides the prophets who give right guidance to humanity. This brings us to the significance of prophetic guidance in Islam.

4.3.2.2. The Nature and Significance of Prophetic Guidance

Like Christianity, Islam also believes that God sent prophets at various stages of human history to provide guidance to humanity. The Qur'an testifies that these prophets were raised from among every race and nation – "We sent a Messenger to every community saying; 'worship God and shun false gods.'" (Surah 16:36). The Qur'an further states that: "Muslims say: 'we believe in God and in what was sent down to us and in what was sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes and what was given to Moses, Jesus and all the prophets by their Lord'" (Surah 2:136). As messengers of Allah, all the prophets are presented by the Qur'an as worthy of belief. To "deny the Prophethood of any of them constitutes disbelief"⁴⁹³ – for their message comes from Allah who is all-knowing. Islam conceives each of these prophets as fundamentally communicating the obligation to acknowledge the *Tawhid*.

So, as the first prophet of Allah, Adam heeded and submitted himself to Allah as the only true God and Creator of all after the fall. However, some of his offspring refused to follow Allah's teachings and committed *shirk*.⁴⁹⁴ Consequently, God raised up prophets to give right guidance to humanity on the straight path to Allah. These prophets accomplished this through *Dhikr* (remembrance) and *Huda* (guidance).⁴⁹⁵ *Dhikr* is not just limited to the sense of "remembering", but takes on the meaning of "mentioning" and "reminding" as well. In the *Tawhid*, the work of the prophets as *Dhikr* was not just limited

⁴⁹³ Badru Kateregga. & David Shenk. 1980, p35

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid, p36

⁴⁹⁵ Sachiko Murata & Williams C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. 1994, p147

to reminding people about the Oneness of God and the human obligation to submit to Him, but it also centred on helping people to confess the *Tawhid* (mention). Those who respond to the prophets appropriately are *muslims* and those who refuse are the truth-concealers. In consequence, *Dhikr* represents the drama of prophecy and the human response to it.⁴⁹⁶

Huda (guidance), however, defines God's reason and motivation for sending the prophets. As we saw earlier, since Iblis' intention and task was to promote misguidance (Surah 7:16-18), God in His Mercy sends the prophets as guides to the actualization of the *fitra*. To actualize the *fitra* is to actualize one's human potential and the actualization of one's potential is the key to happiness and peace.⁴⁹⁷ Hence, the reason for the guidance provided by the prophets from Adam to Muhammad was to lead humanity to a total submission to the will of Allah – expressed in the *Tawhid*. Among these prophets of Allah are: Adam, Noah, Moses, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Zachariah, Jesus and Muhammad. Their universal task was to direct humanity to observe the *Tawhid* – “There is no god but one God” (Surah 21:25). The *Tawhid* is the basic message of each of these prophets. As a result, the Qur'an affirms that “...that which was given to Moses and Jesus and the other prophets by their Lord, We make no distinction among any of them” (Surah 2:136 and 3:84).

Thus, it is considered an act of disbelief for a Muslim to despise the message of any of the prophets of Allah for they all served to bring right guidance to humanity in its response to the *Tawhid* (See Surah 5:48). In consequence, even though Islamic theology views Jesus as a prophet who provided right guidance to the children of Israel with a new Scripture (the Gospels), it could be said that this guidance does not contradict the human obligation to the *Tawhid*. In this way, the message of Jesus is not just significant to Christians only, but it is for Muslims as well since it concerns the obligation to the *Tawhid*. For Islam, faith in one God demands the observation of the *Tawhid* which constitutes the fundamental message of the prophets of Allah (including Jesus). How does Jesus function within this context of the *Tawhid*?

⁴⁹⁶ Sachiko Murata & Williams C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. 1994, p147

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid, p151

4.3.3. Qur'anic Christology: Jesus as the Prophet of Allah

The interest in this area of Qur'anic Christology is to carefully analyse and present some of the references concerning the relationship between Jesus, the Holy Spirit and Allah in the Qur'an and how this relationship contributes in defining the role Jesus played in Allah's divine plan. Since there are many texts which relate to Jesus in the Qur'an, we shall focus particular attention on Surah 2:87; 2:253 and 5:110.

The reasons for selecting these particular texts are that: first of all, these texts capture the identity of Jesus in the Qur'an, asserting his prophetic role within the whole context of Islamic prophecy. Secondly, these texts equally highlight a unique relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit (Ruh al-qudus), who would later be the guide to the prophet Muhammad in his reception of the Qur'an. Though there are other texts of equal importance, we reckon that these texts contain, in themselves, the support we need for a careful reflection on what is today called a "Qur'anic Christology".⁴⁹⁸ We shall approach the above texts thematically, by focusing on the unique relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit and how this contributes to defining his identity and mission.

Our interest in the theme of the Holy Spirit is first of all, informed by the argument that the Holy Spirit constitutes that significant agent who remains instrumental in the life of Jesus in the Qur'an, right from his birth, his public ministry to his final end. Consequently, a careful study of the relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit would help elicit his identity and the role he played within the divine plan of Allah. It would also provide the appropriate context for a better interpretation and understanding of the christological titles ascribed to Jesus in the Qur'an. As a significant agent in the life and ministry of Jesus, the Holy Spirit teaches Jesus the *Injil* (The Gospel) and communicates the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad. So, by virtue of His origin as a messenger of Allah and His involvement in the prophetic missions of Jesus and Muhammad, the Holy Spirit places a stamp of authenticity on the message received by the Qur'anic Jesus and the message of the Qur'an: for both derive their source from Allah. In other words, the Holy

⁴⁹⁸ By "Qur'anic Christology", we mean the narratives in the Qur'an which are able to account for the message, life, identity and mission of Jesus Christ as a prophet of Allah (Neil Robinson. *Christ in Islam and Christianity*. 1991, p164-165).

Spirit could be seen as a principal agent in the communication of message of the *Injil* and the Qur'an.

It will become clearer as the discourse unfolds that the message of the Qur'anic Jesus as can be found in the Qur'an is fundamentally about the observance of the *Tawhid*. Jesus in the Qur'an said; "I have come to you to confirm the truth of the Torah which preceded me... I have come to you with a sign from your Lord. Be mindful of God, obey me. God is my Lord and your Lord, so serve Him – that is the straight path" (Surah 3:50-51). Here, one finds an immediate connection between Jesus' message in the Qur'an and the message of the prophets who preceded him. Since it is the Holy Spirit who is the principal agent through whom Allah communicated His message to His prophets, then the Holy Spirit remains an important agent when reflecting on the identity and mission of the Qur'anic Jesus.

Consequently, our interest would be to investigate the relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit and how this contributes to defining his identity and role as a prophet of God. The significant question here is: if the Holy Spirit is the medium through whom God provides guidance to humanity through the message of His prophets, then how does the message of Jesus in the Qur'an contribute to providing this guidance? We shall commence this section by first considering the identity of the Holy Spirit in the Qur'an and His relationship with Jesus in the light of Surah 2:87, 2:253 and 5:110.

4.3.3.1. The Identity of the Holy Spirit in the Qur'an

According to O'Shaughnessy, "Spirit as a symbol of divine power is a term of unique importance in the religions of both the Semitic people and of the nations directly influenced by them".⁴⁹⁹ It represents the tangible means by which the supreme Deity of both the Judeo-Christian religions and the nature religions of Babylonia, Assyria, Egypt e.t.c exercises control over humanity and the cosmos. For O'Shaughnessy, although this idea of the Spirit may be unique to these religions, it nonetheless represents a natural solution to the problem of how the divine communicates life force to man.

⁴⁹⁹ Thomas O'Shaughnessy. *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit in the Koran*. 1953, p9

Since respiration is universally observed to be coextensive with life and ceases with its cessation, then breath becomes the concrete manifestation of life imparted to humanity through the supreme Deity.⁵⁰⁰ Thus, the Spirit is viewed as the “Divine breath” and the “unseen power” that moves the cosmic forces and gives life to humanity and the entirety of creation. For the Judeo-Christian religions, *Ruh* is the breath of Yahweh, the life-giving spirit in man and the mysterious power at work in the natural phenomena of the universe. According to O’Shaughnessy, in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry the term *ruh* means “breath or blow”. It was only after the establishment of Islam that *ruh* took on an additional meaning of the soul.⁵⁰¹

In the Qur’an the word *Ruh* (Spirit) is used about 20 times.⁵⁰² From the chronological study of *Ruh*, William Shellabear asserts that there are different ways in which *Ruh* is used in the Qur’an. Firstly, at the start of Muhammad’s mission at Mecca, *Ruh* (*Ruh al-Quddus*) was used to refer to the Angel Gabriel (Surah 70:4, 78:38 and 97:4). Secondly, in the later Meccan Surahs, *Ruh* was used in connection with the creation of Adam (Surah 15:29, 38:72, 32:8) and the conception of Jesus (Surah 21:91, 19:17, 66:12). Thirdly, in the Surahs believed to be delivered in Mecca nearer the time of the Hijra, *Ruh* was used in four occasions in connection to the *amr* (a Command, an Order – Surah 16:2, 17:87, 40:15).⁵⁰³ Finally, “in the Medina Surahs it is stated three times that Jesus was aided with the Holy Spirit (*Ruh al-qudus* Surah 2:87, 2:53 and 5:110), once that Jesus was himself a spirit from Allah (Surah 4:171) and once that the believers had been aided with a spirit from Allah (Surah 58:22).”⁵⁰⁴

From these different forms of usage, though the word *Ruh* appears to mean: something distinct from the angels and yet in some way associated with them or something associated to the creation of Adam and Jesus,⁵⁰⁵ the spirit is that force which gives life through the command of Allah. When referred to as *Ruh al-Quddus*, Samuel Schlorff

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid, p9

⁵⁰¹ Thomas O’Shaughnessy. *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit in the Koran*. 1953, p11

⁵⁰² Ibid, p13-15

⁵⁰³ Williams G. Shellabear. “The Development of the word ‘Spirit’ as Used in the Koran” in *The Muslim World*. 22 (4), 1932, p355

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid, p356

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid, p356

asserts that without exception Muslims identify it with Gabriel, the Angel of revelation. Hence, “when the Qur’an states that Jesus, Muhammad and others, were strengthened by the Holy Spirit, it is clearly referring to the Angel Gabriel in the process of revelation”.⁵⁰⁶ Indeed, the word Spirit or *al-Ruh* may be taken to mean the “soul”, the “breath of life” or as “intangibility”. However, when specifically mentioned as “Ruh al-Quddus” in the Qur’an, many Islamic scholars are of the view that it refers to the Angel Gabriel. Let us see how the relationship between Jesus and the Angel Gabriel (the Holy Spirit) helps us arrive at a better understanding of the identity and mission of Jesus.

4.3.3.2. The Relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit

The discourse here is centred on three Qur’anic texts: Surah 2:87; 2:253 and 5:110. Whereas each of these three verses state that Jesus was “strengthened by the Holy Spirit”, our interest is to investigate what this phrase means within the Qur’an. We shall do this through the exegetical views of three Islamic scholars – namely Abu Ja’far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, Abu al-Qasim Mahmud ibn Umar al-Zamakhshari and Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Umar ibn al-Husayn al-Taymi al-Bakri al-Tabaristani Fakhr al-Din al-Razi; because of the lengthy nature of these names we shall adopt their fully recognised shorter forms such as al-Tabari, al-Zamakhshari and al-Razi for simple referencing.

The reasons for the recourse to these three classical Islamic commentators are that on the one hand, they enjoy some degree of historical proximity to the beginning stages of the development of Islam and therefore have the privilege of being classical commentators. Yet on the other hand, their commitment to the religion of Islam, coupled with their desire to learn more about the religion through the application of linguistics, philosophical and exegetical tools, brings freshness to the issues of textual interpretations in the Qur’an. In other words, these commentators provide the insiders’ point of view in respect of the interpretations of the above Qur’anic texts. The texts under consideration are:

⁵⁰⁶ “The Theological and Apologetical Dimensions of Muslim Evangelization” in *Westminster Theological Journal*. Vol. 42 (1986), p335
http://www.answering-islam.org/Authors/Schlorff/schlorff1_f.html (12/04/2013)

Surah 2:87 – We gave Moses the scriptures and We sent messengers after him in succession. We gave Jesus, son of Mary, clear signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit. So now, how is it that whenever a messenger brings you something, you don't like, you become arrogant, calling some imposters and killing others?"

Surah 2:253 – We favoured some of the messengers above others. We gave Jesus, son of Mary our clear signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit.

Surah 5:110 – Then God will say, 'Jesus, son of Mary! Remember my favour to you and your mother: how I strengthened you with the Holy Spirit, so that you spoke in your infancy and as a grown man; how I taught you the Scriptures and the wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel; how by My leave, you fashioned the shape of a bird out of clay, breathed into it and it became by My leave a bird; how by My leave, you brought the dead back to life; how by My leave, I retrained the children of Israel from harming you when you brought them the clear signs and those of them who disbelieved said, 'This is clearly nothing but sorcery.'⁵⁰⁷

The underlined sentences and phrases will be part of our primary exegetical concern. Let us see how the contributions of al-Tabari, al-Zamakhshari and al-Razi help us to understand the relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit and the identity and mission this relationship underscores.

(i) Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (224/838 – 310/923)

Al-Tabari was an orthodox Muslim of Sunni belonging, very scrupulous in his predilections on the type of material he relied on for his commentary on the Qur'an. He was very dogmatic in his thoughts which found intellectual resonance with the Islamic school of Ibn Hanbal in Bagdad where he studied.⁵⁰⁸ According to Franz Rosenthal, al-Tabari memorized the Qur'an at the age of seven and qualified as a religious leader at eight and started learning the tradition of the prophets at nine.⁵⁰⁹ From this wealth of knowledge, he employed a methodology centred on the collection of disparate traditions and the

⁵⁰⁷ Texts are taken from M. A. S. Abdel Haleem. *The Qur'an: A New Translation*. 2010.

⁵⁰⁸ Edmund Bosworth. "Al-Tabari" in *the Encyclopedia of Islam*. Vol. 10 (1998), p12

⁵⁰⁹ Franz Rosenthal (Trans.). *The History of al-Tabari*. Vol. 1 (1989), p10-12

critical analysis of the chain of transmitters so as to verify the authenticity of the tradition concerned.

According to Neal Robinson, al-Tabari “comments on the whole Qur’an in sequence dividing each Surah into subsections which vary in length. He introduces each subsection with a phrase which reminds the reader that it is God’s word”.⁵¹⁰ He then presents the text with its paraphrase and quotes other texts in the Qur’an to explain the meaning of the text. He proceeds to render his personal view based on the analysis. One body of work which is attributed to him is: *Jāmi’ al-Bayān fī Tafsir al-Qur’an* (Collection of Explanations for Interpretation of the Qur’an). According to Ayoub, al-Tabari’s work is the “first major work in the development of traditional Qur’anic sciences”.⁵¹¹ For Jane McAuliffe, this work showcased the classical era of Qur’anic exegesis.⁵¹²

According to al-Tabari, the phrase “strengthen him with the Holy Spirit,” connects Jesus to the Holy Spirit in Surah 2:87 and Surah 2:253. But this phrase is preceded by; “We gave Jesus, son of Mary the sign”. The *sign* refers to the miracles Jesus performed. These were meant to authenticate the truthfulness of his claim to be the prophet of Allah. His power to raise the dead back to life, to breathe life into clay birds and heal the sick, adds up as evidence to this claim. Jesus’ ability to inform people about what was happening in their homes testified to his knowledge of the unseen. On the question of strengthening, al-Tabari suggests two meanings: first of all, it could mean that God empowered Jesus with unique characteristics that supported him in facing challenges of all kinds. Secondly, it could also mean that God gave Jesus the *Injil* since both the Qur’an and the *Injil* are viewed as having their source from God.⁵¹³

In his analysis of Surah 5:110, al-Tabari concluded that the Holy Spirit could only be identified as the Angel Gabriel because, if in this verse, Jesus is strengthened by the Holy Spirit and given the *Injil* then two things (the Holy Spirit and the Gospel) are given to Jesus and not one; because the Holy Spirit and the Gospel could not mean one and the

⁵¹⁰ Robinson Neal. *Christ in Islam and Christianity*. 1991, p71

⁵¹¹ Mahmoud Ayoub. *The Qur’an and its Interpreters*. 1984, p3-4

⁵¹² Jane McAuliffe. *Qur’anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*. 1991, p19-20

⁵¹³ Abū Ja’far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari. *Jāmi’ al-Bayān fī ta’wil al-Qur’an*. Beirut, Lebanon. Vol. 1, p448-449 also in W. F. Madelung & A. Jones (eds.). *The Commentary on the Qur’an by Abū Ja’far Muhammad ibn Jarir Al-Tabari*. 1989, p447-449

same thing.⁵¹⁴ Al-Tabari's identification of Gabriel as the Holy Spirit is further sustained by His argument that Gabriel is the Angel of revelation from God to all the other prophets. Hence, Gabriel's primary function was to assist Jesus by teaching him the Torah, the Wisdom, the *Injil* and endowing him with power to perform wondrous signs.⁵¹⁵ In consequence, al-Tabari concludes that the Holy Spirit is the Angel Gabriel who assist Jesus in the performance of the miracles. Gabriel's relationship with Jesus therefore remains instrumental in substantiating Jesus' prophetic claims. Having seen what al-Tabari makes of these texts (Surah 2:87, 2: 253 and 5: 110), how does al-Zamakhshari interpret them in the light of the identities of Jesus and the Holy Spirit on the one hand and the relationship between them on the other?

(ii) Abu al-Qasim Mahmud ibn Umar al-Zamakhshari (467/1075 – 537/1144)

Umar al-Zamakhshari is an Iranian Muslim who belongs to the Mu'tazillite theological school.⁵¹⁶ He was a renowned philologist who considered Arabic as the queen of languages. According to Mohammad Khaleel, "he journeyed to Mecca, studied there for a while... It was in this city, on a second visit that he wrote his famous Tafsir, completing the work in two years attributable, he said, to the spiritual influence of his environs".⁵¹⁷ Despite his Mu'tazilli persuasion, Ayoub intimates that the Tafsir of al-Zamakhshari is even regarded by the Sunni ulama as one of the most significant works of Tafsir.⁵¹⁸ Islamic scholars of every rank and file have tremendous respect for him, even though some disagree with some of his ideas because of their hint of Mu'tazillite theology.⁵¹⁹ It is said that al-Zamakhshari steers his Islamic theological concepts and opinions carefully, bringing out a sense of novelty and freshness and opening up windows to alternative interpretations.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid, p450

⁵¹⁵ Ibid, p450

⁵¹⁶ The Mu'tazillites is an Islamic school of theology based on rational philosophy. It asserts that, the perfect unity and eternal nature of Allah does not allow for the claim that the Qur'an is co-eternal with God. Hence, it is created. Once it is created, it can be accessible to reason. Thus, knowledge becomes the final arbiter in the question of right and wrong. (Abdullah Saeed. *The Qur'an: An Introduction*. 2008, p203)

⁵¹⁷ Mohammad Khaleel. *David in the Muslim Tradition*. 2015, p63

⁵¹⁸ Mahmoud Ayoub . *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters*.1984, p5

⁵¹⁹ Mohammad Khaleel indicates that, while Ibn Khallikān praised al-Zamakhshari's work noting that "nothing like it has been written before," Taimiyya rather thought that the work was full of heretical innovations. (See Mohammad Khaleel. *David in the Muslim Tradition*. 2015, p63)

In his interpretation of *sign* in the three texts named above, al-Zamakhshari indicates that *sign* here refers to the miracles Jesus performed and the disputations he engaged in as he tried to point out the right way to worship Allah. Like al-Tabari, al-Zamakhshari contends that these signs authenticated the prophetic identity of Jesus.⁵²⁰ Jesus is therefore strengthened by the Holy Spirit who emanates from God, for the purpose of carrying out the divine will. For al-Zamakhshari, there is no fusion or unity of substance in the relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit.⁵²¹ The Spirit is only Allah's living breath which animates the life of Jesus through Allah's favour.⁵²² Al-Zamakhshari views the interpretation of Surah 2:253 as practically the same as Surah 2:87.

In respect to Surah 5:110 he observes that the discourse between Jesus and Allah is not about Jesus *per se*, but meant to re-orientate the people of Israel to the right path as a result of their rejection of Jesus and his message. In Surah 5:110, while some rejected Jesus' prophetic claims, others interpreted the signs he performed as pure sorcery. Yet others even went on further to divinize him. So by questioning Jesus on his divine status, Allah sought to correct the wrongdoers who divinised him as God or Son of God.⁵²³ Al-Zamakhshari then concludes that since Jesus was animated by *Ruh al-Qudus* from birth, his whole life is marked by purity from sin and wrongdoing.⁵²⁴ Thus, the understanding of Jesus as the spirit of Allah only points to the fact that Jesus came into being through a special intervention of Allah, without human seed or substance.⁵²⁵ Like al-Tabari, al-Zamakhshari also asserts that the Holy Spirit refers to the Angel Gabriel.

Consequently, in al-Zamakhshari, we find two significant interpretive assertions which introduce some freshness to Qur'anic Christology. First of all, al-Zamakhshari identifies the Holy Spirit also as the pure breathe of Allah. Since the Holy Spirit symbolises purity then His presence in the life of Jesus from beginning to end suggests that Jesus' whole life was marked by purity (the absence of sin and wrongdoing). Secondly and

⁵²⁰ Al-Zamakhshari. *Al-Kashshāf*. 4 Vols. (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ilmiyah, 2006), vol. 1, p162

⁵²¹ Ibid, p163

⁵²² O'Shaughnessy. *The Koranic Concept of the Word of God* (Table II – Spirit) 1953, p32 and (Table IV – Spirit Sense group D), p52

⁵²³ See Neil Robinson. *Christ in Islam and Christianity*. 1991, p152

⁵²⁴ Al-Zamakhshari. *Al-Kashshaf*. vol.1, p675-676

⁵²⁵ O'Shaughnessy. (Table V – Spirit Sense group E) 1953, p65

worth noting is al-Zamakhshari's assertion that the dialogue between Jesus and Allah in Surah 5:110 was meant to re-orient the people of Israel to right guidance on the identity and prophetic task of Jesus. If one pieces together the element of his purity with his task as a prophet of Allah, one finds a fine prophet who demonstrates an unwavering commitment to providing guidance in the acknowledgement of the *Tawhid*.

(iii) Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Umar Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (534/1149 – 606/1209)

Commonly known as Fakhruddin Razi, al-Razi was a Persian Sunni theologian and philosopher, born in 1149 in Iran and died in 1209 in Afghanistan. His commentaries on the Qur'an are known to be unique because of their context of varied and multi-sided approaches to the text. Two of his major works are; the Tafsir-e Kabir (The Great Commentary) and the Mafatih al-Ghayb (The Keys to the Unknown). Al-Razi was a rationalist who believed in the "self sufficiency of the human intellect" and its power to unravel truths. Even though he considered that proofs based on the hadiths only lead to presumptions, he nonetheless gradually acknowledged the primacy of the truths of the Qur'an. In al-Razi one finds the harmonization of reason and revelation in the interpretation of text.⁵²⁶

Unlike al-Tabari who was very orthodox – restricting himself to the hadiths and other recognised Islamic traditions in his interpretations, al-Razi approaches these verses (Surah 2:87, Surah 2: 253 and Surah 5: 110) from a more philosophical perspective, rendering his exegetical style in layers of arguments and counter-arguments.⁵²⁷ In doing this, al-Razi does not only seek evidence of meaning in the texts, but seeks to discern the deeper meaning of the texts. He starts by first providing a translation of a Qur'anic paragraph followed by the disputes surrounding its meaning and status, abrogated or otherwise. He then correlates the various positions of the earliest Arabic Qur'anic commentators, seeking knowledge of the reasons for the revelation of the verse and knowledge of what God intended as its meaning. According to Ayoub, al-Razi's work is

⁵²⁶ John Cooper. "al-Razi Fakhr al-Din (1149-1209)" in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. 1998
<http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ip/rep/H044.htm> (09/09/2014)

⁵²⁷ Mahmoud Ayoub. *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters*. 1984, p5

one of *Tafsir and Ta'wil* where “Tafsir concerns the translation of tradition, while Ta'wil seeks a deeper comprehension of the inner meaning of the sacred text.”⁵²⁸ According to Ayoub, one finds an effective play of these exegetical styles in his *Tafsir al-Kabir* (The Great Commentary) and *Mafatih al-Ghayb* (Keys to the Unknown).⁵²⁹

In respect of the interpretation of the above three verses, al-Razi first draws a link of continuity between the prophet Moses and Jesus from the beginning statement of Surah 2:87 – “We gave Moses the scriptures and We sent messengers after him in succession”. Here, al-Razi asserts that divine guidance was given by Allah for the Jews through Moses. However, the Jews later disagreed among themselves leading to civil strife and the general perversion of their faith. Consequently, God sent successive messengers to remind them about the message of Moses and to provide them with right guidance. This continued until the advent of Jesus. According to al-Razi, while all the other prophets after Moses were committed to the content of the Mosaic message, Jesus brought in a new shari’a, a new law and path – the *Injil*. This new law had to be proven through the miracles Jesus performed in his infancy and public ministry.⁵³⁰

In his interpretations of Ruh al-Quddus, al-Razi does not differ from the views of al-Tabari and al-Zamakhshari. For him the Holy Spirit is the same as the Angel Gabriel who emanates from Allah but is not part of Allah.⁵³¹ Gabriel is created by God as His messenger who animates Allah’s servants. Al-Razi also views Ruh al-Quddus as Allah’s life-giving breath, breathed into man.⁵³² The Angel Gabriel is created by Allah to obey Allah’s commands and carry them out.⁵³³ Al-Razi intimates that Gabriel as an Angel is exalted above the rest of the Angels on the basis of two realities: first of all, he is the intermediary between God and all the messengers of God communicating the revelation of God to them.⁵³⁴ It is Gabriel who teaches Jesus the Torah, the wisdom and the *Injil* (Surah

⁵²⁸ Ibid, p21

⁵²⁹ Ibid, p5

⁵³⁰ Fakhr al-Razi. *Tafsir al-Kabir*. Dar al-Kutub Al-‘imiyyah, n.d. Tehran.Vol.3, p175-176. See also Neil Robinson. *Christ in Islam and Christianity*. 1991, p144-145

⁵³¹ O’Shaughnessy. (Table I – Spirit Sense group A) 1953, p24

⁵³² Ibid, p32

⁵³³ Ibid, p43

⁵³⁴ Fakhr al-Razi. *al-Tafsir al-Kabir*. 3: p177

5: 110). Secondly, Gabriel brought the spirit of Jesus to Mary through the agency of his breath – *nafkh*.⁵³⁵

Thus, it is the Holy Spirit who brings the truths of Allah to the prophets. This is supported by Surah 16:102 when the Qur'an says; "Say, the Holy Spirit has brought the revelation with the Truth step by step from your Lord to strengthen the believers and as guidance and good news to the devout". Similar to the views of al-Zamakhshari, al-Razi also asserts that the verse in Surah 5:110 is the consequence of the two modes of misunderstanding connected to the association of divinity to Jesus. The first mode of misapprehension is the Jewish disbelief in Jesus as a prophet of Allah despite the signs he performed to prove his prophetic calling. The second mode of misunderstanding is the later Christian deification of Jesus as divine.⁵³⁶

In his esoteric interpretation of the ta'wil of Surah 5:110, al-Razi intimates that Ruh or Spirit essentially has two natures: "the pure and luminous spirit" and "the wicked and tyrannical spirit" who have the power to rule over an individual or be a means by which others are ruled. Ruh can therefore be luminous or dark. So, if Jesus is referred to as "a Spirit from Allah" it is because he is a Spirit that is wholly pure and luminous from Allah. His ontological constitution as a pure spirit from Allah establishes the relationship between him and Gabriel,⁵³⁷ for Gabriel was identified as al-Quddus because he is created from pure light.⁵³⁸ By connecting the purity of Gabriel with that of Jesus, al-Razi then concluded that in the history of prophecy no prophet ever possessed the qualities that Jesus had. In al-Razi one sees a sustained argument for the unparalleled uniqueness of Jesus *vis-avis* the other prophets who preceded him.

In conclusion, when one considers the views of the above three Islamic commentators on Surah 2:87, Surah 2:253 and Surah 5:110, one is given a clearer understanding of what Muslims mean when they talk about the Holy Spirit and the sort of relationship that existed between him and the Qur'anic Jesus. Here, all three commentators (al-Tabari, al-Zamakhshari and al-Razi) concur that the Holy Spirit is the same as the

⁵³⁵ Ibid, p178 and Neal Robinson. *Christ in Islam and Christianity*. 1991, p146

⁵³⁶ Fakhr al-Razi. *Tafsir al-Kabir*. Dar al-Kutub Al-'imiyyah, n.d. Tehran. Vol.12, p122-124

⁵³⁷ Ibid, Vol. 12, p125

⁵³⁸ Ibid Vol.3, p178

Angel Gabriel. Islam views the Angel Gabriel as over-ranking the other angels and is the agent who communicates God's revealed message to His messengers. The commentators also agree that Gabriel is referred to as al-qudus (purity) because he is created from pure light.⁵³⁹ In this way, we could say that if Jesus is referred to as a spirit from Allah, it could be because of his life of purity and holiness.

Furthermore, from all three commentators one realizes that it is the Angel Gabriel who constantly assisted Jesus in the performance of his miracles and these miracles were signs intended to authenticate Jesus' role as a messenger of Allah. Only al-Razi indicates that Jesus remains unique from the other prophets who preceded him, because he brings in a new Shariah, a new law to the people of Israel. Al-Zamakhshari and al-Razi also agree that the dialogue between Allah and Jesus (in Surah 5:110) is meant to correct a wrong "Christology" in practice among the Jews and Christians. Firstly, while the Jews rejected the authenticity of Jesus' prophetic calling and rejected the miracles he performed as pure sorcery, Allah's dialogue with Jesus in Surah 5:110 had the purpose of re-orienting them to the authenticity of Jesus' claim as a prophet of Allah. Secondly, while Christians accepted Jesus' miracles as authentic; they nonetheless interpreted these miracles as signs which pointed to his divinity as God and Son of God, giving Jesus the same divine status as God. Consequently, al-Zamakhshari and al-Razi agree that the dialogue in Surah 5:110 was meant to correct this Christian deification of Jesus as the "Son of God".

In the nutshell, one could say that the Christology of the Qur'an is built on the relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit identified as the Angel Gabriel. It is Gabriel who teaches guides, strengthens and assists Jesus in doing what he was sent to do as a messenger of Allah. As al-Tabarsi puts it, if it is asked why Jesus was specially mentioned among all the prophets as being supported by Gabriel even though every prophet was also supported by him, it would be because "Gabriel accompanied him from his youth to his manhood. He was with him wherever he went, so that when the Jews conspired to kill him, He the Holy Spirit did not leave him until he took him to heaven".⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁹ Sachiko Murata & Williams C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. 1994, p85-89

⁵⁴⁰ Al-Tabarsi Vol. 1, p249 cited in Mahmoud Ayoub. *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters*. 1984, p124-125

4.4. Conclusion to the Christian and Muslim Perspectives on Christology

Both the Qur'an and the Bible respectively shape the way faithful Muslims and Christians understand the nature of God and interpret reality. For Islam, there is no god but One God (*Tawhid*). The one God is the creator and sustainer of everything that exists. As the creator, He transcends His creation (*Tanzih*) and yet is immanent to His creation (*Tashbih*). He created humanity for one sole purpose – to worship Him and be good vicegerents to the rest of creation. To help humanity fulfil this purpose, God sent messengers to provide them with the right guidance. Among these messengers was Jesus, the *Messiah*, the son of Mary. From the context of the *Tawhid*, though Jesus is given reverential designations such as *Messiah*, Spirit of/from God, Word of/from God and the friend of God among others, these titles only define his role as a prophet or messenger of Allah. Here, Jesus succeeded in performing his prophetic task through his intimate connection with the Holy Spirit.

For Christianity, although God is one, Jesus Christ is the second person of the triune God (the Holy Trinity) who took on human nature through the incarnation in order to redeem fallen humanity from its bondage of sin and death. Through his death and resurrection Jesus Christ atoned for the sins of fallen humanity (see Genesis 3:1-24) and therefore made salvation possible for all believers. It could only take the sinless one to redeem the sinful (Rom 5:12, 18-19). Though he walked the face of the earth as a human being (the Son of Man), he was nonetheless God (the Son of God). This explains why it is impossible to speak of God within the parameters of Christian theology without relating such statements to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.⁵⁴¹

In consequence, the Christian and Islamic tradition-specific understandings of Christology demonstrate that each religious tradition has a theological framework which supports a coherent articulation of their respective perspective on the identity and mission of Jesus Christ. For Islam, Jesus is only a prophet or messenger of Allah because Allah is only one and none is comparable to Him (*Tawhid*). For Christian theology, Jesus is both God and man, the second person of the Holy Trinity because God is one in three persons. Thus, we could say that the *Tawhid* and the Holy Trinity constitute the two theological

⁵⁴¹ Alister McGrath. *Christian Theology*. 1997, p324

constructs which set apart the Islamic and Christian views on the identity and mission of Jesus Christ.

Up till now, dialogue as an exercise in learning from and about the other demands that these views should be fully shared, clearly understood and deeply respected as essential to the Christian and Islamic theologizing about Jesus. Not only do they represent Christian and Islamic tradition-specific understandings of the identity and mission of Jesus, but they contribute in shaping how Christians and Muslims view and interpret God and reality. As different systems of belief (the *Tawhid* and the Holy Trinity), one system cannot be used as the standard of measurement for the truthfulness of the other. What is rather possible and beneficial, is to engage in a dialogue whose purpose is geared towards learning from and about what the other has to say about Jesus Christ through the method of comparative theology. In this way, our next task in chapter five shall be to critically correlate some Christian and Islamic christological themes and titles which we have all along “‘passed-over’ in silence” in this chapter. The purpose would be to see how they contribute in shaping the identity and mission of Jesus Christ in Islam and Christianity on the one hand and, on the other hand, how this might offer learning examples for Christian-Muslim dialogue of life and the dialogue of common action.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY AND CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DIALOGUE ON CHRISTOLOGY AS AN EXERCISE IN LEARNING

5.1. Introduction

The fact that Jesus Christ remains the central figure in Christian faith and theology and yet is significantly referenced in the Qur'an presents a common ground for undertaking a comparative theological exercise between "Qur'anic Christology" and the Christology of the Synoptic Gospels. The interest is to engage Christians and Muslims in dialogue as an exercise in learning, where each learns and understands the other's point of view on the identity and mission of Jesus Christ and how this learning can help them to interrelate more friendly and peacefully and collaborate in the living out of values espoused by the message of Jesus in their respective traditions. We hope to embark on this comparative theological exercise through the critical correlation of some key christological titles and themes derived from the Qur'an and the Synoptic Gospels.

In his assessment of earlier researches on Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology, Mahmoud Ayoub indicated that "earlier research on the subject of Jesus in Islam has been comparative and usually, the yardstick being the New Testament record of the life, teachings and significance of Jesus, the Christ. Useful as this research may have been... it had often harboured old prejudices and fostered new hostilities".⁵⁴² For Hamilton Gibb, the reason for these hostilities is because such comparative assessments do not do justice to Islam as "an autonomous expression of religious thoughts and experiences which must be viewed in and through its own principles and standards".⁵⁴³ In our contemporary context which is characterised by an all-pervading context of otherness, the voice of the other can no longer be silenced by totalitarian and hegemonic philosophies and systems of belief. In other words, it is no longer acceptable to give Christian interpretations to theological themes and concepts which are particularly Islamic. In the same way, one

⁵⁴² Mahmoud Ayoub. "Towards an Islamic Christology" in the *Muslim World*. 1976, p165

⁵⁴³ Hamilton A. R. Gibb. *Muhammadanism*. 1962, pvii

cannot also read the Synoptic Gospels with an Islamic bias.⁵⁴⁴ To do so, is to ignore the fact the Bible and the Qur'an have different historical contexts and modes of revelation; and as such, have different theological frameworks within which the identity and mission of Jesus Christ are construed.

Thus, for Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology to be successful as an exercise in learning, the other must be viewed as an original source of self-understanding, capable of communicating a unique experience.⁵⁴⁵ Gadamer emphasized this same claim when he asserted that “in human relations the important thing is to experience the *Thou* truly as a *Thou*, not to overlook his claims, but to let him truly say something to us ”.⁵⁴⁶ The interest in learning from and about the other can genuinely take place when we allow the other to say something to us about themselves and about who they conceive Jesus to be and that which inspires these conceptions. As Panikkar understands, “to cross the boundaries of one’s culture without realizing that the other may have a radically different approach to reality is today no longer admissible. If still consciously done, it would be philosophically naïve, politically outrageous and religiously sinful ”.⁵⁴⁷

In consequence, while chapter four sought to create the space for Islam and Christianity to communicate their respective understandings on Christology, this chapter seeks to critically correlate some of the key christological titles, themes and concepts which emerged within the process. The purpose here is to further learn and understand their meaning within their specific contexts and how this may provide learning examples for Christian-Muslim dialogue of life and dialogue of common action. Hence, this current chapter is a development of that which preceded it. In this work of critical correlation, our attention shall be on the following Christological titles and themes: *Messiah, Word of/from God, Spirit of/from God, Son of God, the Trinity, the Death and Resurrection, the Virginal Conception, the Ascension and Second Coming of Jesus*, among others. The critical correlations of these themes and titles may disclose the significant place Jesus occupies in each tradition and how this context of “Jesus-significance” could points to certain religious

⁵⁴⁴ Heikki Räisänen. “The Portrait of Jesus in the Qur'an: Reflections of a Biblical Scholars”, in *The Muslim World*. 1980, p123

⁵⁴⁵ Panikkar. *The Cosmotheandric Experience*. 1993, p60. & *Intra-Religious Dialogue*. 1999, p34.

⁵⁴⁶ Gadamer. *Truth and Methods*. 1989, p361

⁵⁴⁷ Panikkar. *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*. 1979, p9

values within each tradition. While this area would be the focus of chapter six, the purpose would be to see how these religious values (espoused by the life and mission of Jesus), could become contexts for Christian-Muslim dialogue of life and the dialogue of common action.

5.2. Correlation of Key Christological titles in Islam and Christianity

Just as the NT designates multiple Christological titles to Jesus Christ,⁵⁴⁸ so also the Qur’anic portrait of Jesus accord him some honorific titles,⁵⁴⁹ some of which appear to be similar to the NT designations. It will be the task of this section to try to understand these titles or themes within their Christian and Islamic tradition-specific contexts. While Jesus Christ is construed as “Son of God” in Christianity, he is considered a “messenger of Allah” in Islam. Thus, the work of critical correlation would focus on clarifying the meanings of the titles ascribed to Jesus in Christianity and Islam. We shall focus on three of these christological titles – namely *Messiah*, Spirit of/from God and Word of/from God.

5.2.1. Jesus as *Al-Masih* (*Messiah* or the Christ)

According to Parrinder, Jesus is referred as *al-Masih* eleven (11) times in the Qur’an. All these verses appear in the Medinan Surahs.⁵⁵⁰ But the meaning it associates with this title is different from the heavily loaded soteriological implications it carries within Christian theology.⁵⁵¹ In Surah 3:45, which concerns the annunciation of Jesus’ birth, Jesus is referred to as *Messiah* – “the Angel said to Mary, God gives you news of a Word from Him, whose name will be the *Messiah*, Jesus, son of Mary..”. In Surah 5:72, the title is used as a personal name for Jesus – “the *Messiah* himself said; children of Israel, worship God, my Lord and your Lord”. So, the title *Messiah* is used in reference to Jesus at all periods of his life – from his birth to his final exaltation.⁵⁵² However, though Parrinder asserts that there seems to be no explanation as to what this title conceptually means, the title nonetheless appears to have a particular sense, demonstrated by the injunction in

⁵⁴⁸ Some of these titles include: Lord, Messiah, son of God, son of man, Word of God, Redeemer and God.

⁵⁴⁹ Some of these titles include: Messiah, son of Mary, Messenger, prophet, Word of God, and Spirit of God (Parrinder. *Jesus in the Qur’an*. 1965, p16)

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid, p30

⁵⁵¹ O’Collins. *Christology*. 2009, 42-28

⁵⁵² Parrinder. *Jesus in the Qur’an*. 1965, p30

Surah 4:171 – “people of the Book, do not go to excess in your religion and do not say anything about God except the truth; the *Messiah*, Jesus, son of Mary, was nothing more than a messenger of God”. To reaffirm this claim, the Qur’an in Surah 5:17 also says – “those who say God is the *Messiah*, the son of Mary, are defying the truth”.

Consequently, Parrinder says that “while there is no Qur’anic etymological explanation of the word *Masih*, it was not difficult for the commentators to find a number of meanings”⁵⁵³ associated with the term. Though there seems to be no specific etymology about the concept in Islam, other than the understanding that it means “anointing”, what one can emphatically say about the title *Messiah* is that in Islam, the title has no divine connotations. It simply means Jesus was “anointed”⁵⁵⁴ by Allah from birth for a special mission as His prophet. If one takes serious considerations of the claims in Surah 4:171, then one could say that the title “*Messiah*” in the Qur’an designates the personal name of Jesus who is a prophet or messenger of Allah. However, while Islamic commentators like al-Zamakhshari and al-Baidawi concede that the title *Messiah* is a foreign word in Arabic,⁵⁵⁵ some later Islamic commentators considered the Arabic *al-Masih* to mean “King, righteous, pure” or “one anointed with sacred oil from birth”. In Moucarry’s view, *al-malik* (King) and *al-siddik* (righteous one) might be more appropriate in reference to the meaning of the title *Messiah*.⁵⁵⁶

Having said this, it is worthwhile to mention that though the title *Messiah* does not add divine connotations to the identity of Jesus, Shi’i Islam seem to present what Ayoub calls a “quasi soteriological Christology in the doctrine and role of the Imams, the spiritual heads of the community”.⁵⁵⁷ According to Ayoub, Ali the first Imam compared himself to Jesus in Shi’i Islam. By first declaring God as One, Ali talks about himself and his

⁵⁵³ Parrinder. *Jesus in the Qur’an*. 1965, p31

⁵⁵⁴ The hadith *Bukhari* reports that, Jesus was constantly seen with wet hair which looked as if water was dripping from his head all the time. This signified that Jesus naturally “anointed” as a prophet of Allah. (See Sahih Muslim Book 001, Hadith number 0323) <http://hadithcollection.com/sahihmuslim/129-Sahih%20Muslim%20Book%2001.%20Faith/8461-sahih-muslim-book-001-hadith-number-0323.html> (16/03/2015)

⁵⁵⁵ See Parrinder. *Jesus in the Qur’an*. 1965, p31

⁵⁵⁶ George C. Moucarry. *The Prophet and the Messiah: An Arab Christian Perspective on Islam and Christianity*. 2002, p179-180

⁵⁵⁷ Mahmoud Ayoub. “Towards an Islamic Christology.” 1978, p167

descendants (the remaining eleven Imams) as being created by God's word.⁵⁵⁸ What is significant here is that these twelve Imams are seen as the mediators between God and humanity. As Ayoub puts it, "they are a source of salvation on the Day of Reckoning for those who accept their status as the friends of God and true heirs of the prophets".⁵⁵⁹ These Imams are supposed to return at the end of time and the twelfth Imam would be the *Messiah* who would establish divine rule over the earth, with Jesus assisting him in his final act of redemption and judgement.⁵⁶⁰ Even though Ayoub acknowledges that Islam really has no concept of sin and redemption analogous of the Christian view, he nonetheless asserts that as a messenger of God, Jesus could be viewed as "a saviour in that he, by his message, helped to guide humanity from error and to guide its footsteps on the path to God".⁵⁶¹ This notwithstanding, one must always be reminded that in nowhere in Islamic scholarship, does Jesus' title as *Messiah* carry divine connotations.

Within the context of Christian faith and theology, as we saw in chapter four, Mark from the onset, declares his Christological intent in the prologue of the Gospel – "the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God" (1:1). Whereas we know that the title *Messiah* is a Hebrew term which means the "anointed one", the use of *Christos* (Christ) here is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *Messiah*. This title has a history beginning from the time of Abraham through to the time of the post-exilic prophets and John the Baptist. In this history, God brought Israel's attention to certain expectations in terms of different strands of future divine actions that will establish justice and peace. With Abraham, God established a covenant, stating that all the people of the earth shall be blessed in him (Gen 22:15-18). Here, the Messianic promise is more or less, the awaiting of the messianic era than the promise of the person of the *Messiah*.

However, the expectation of this future divine event became associated with some of Abraham's descendants, namely the Davidic line of kings.⁵⁶² King David (1Samuel

⁵⁵⁸ God "uttered a Word which became a light. From that light he created me and my progeny. Then God uttered another Word which became a Spirit, and from that spirit he made to dwell in the light. The light he made to dwell in our bodies. Thus, we are the Spirit of God and the Word of God" (Ibid, p167)

⁵⁵⁹ Mahmoud Ayoub. "Towards an Islamic Christology." 1978, p168

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid, p168

⁵⁶¹ Ibid, p167

⁵⁶² Walter C. Kaiser. *The Messiah in the Old Testament*. 1995, p77-83

16:1ff) is known for his excellent kingship. After David and Solomon, God promises Israel an Ideal Davidic king who will establish perfect peace and justice. This longing for the ideal Davidic king became associated with the prophecies of the anointed one who will destroy the enemies of Israel.⁵⁶³ Later on, these messianic utterances became intertwined with popular consciousness (the unfaithfulness of Israel's kings) leading to the prophecies which indicated that God himself was going to be their liberator.⁵⁶⁴ These prophecies gave rise to the association of divinity to the status of the *Messiah* (Isaiah 9:5-6), the virginity of his mother (Isaiah 7:14) and his place of birth (Micah 5:2-3). From then on, Israel awaited the coming of the promised *Messiah*.

Consequently, after having experienced Jesus personally, Peter made a breakthrough on the way to Caesarea-Philippi by identifying Jesus as the Christ (Mark 8:29). Without having to repeat what was said in chapter four, what is worth-noting here is that in Christian faith and theology, the ascription of the title *Messiah* to Jesus Christ points to the fact that Jesus Christ is the son of God and saviour of the world. As McGrath puts it, to assert that Jesus Christ makes salvation possible, is not to deny the possibility of other modes of salvation, but “to insist that within the Christian tradition, the distinctively Christian understanding of what salvation is can only be realized on the basis of Jesus Christ”.⁵⁶⁵ So, while the prophecies in the OT (See Isaiah 7:14, 9:5-6, Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12 and Daniel 7: 13-14) predicted the coming of the anointed one who will bring liberation to the people of Israel,⁵⁶⁶ the Synoptic Gospels see Jesus Christ as the fulfilment of these prophecies.

In consequence, while *Messiah* in Islam depicts the identity of Jesus as a prophet of Allah, in Christianity this title has a soteriological import. It identifies Jesus Christ as the son of God and saviour of the world. Jesus Christ as the *Messiah* in the Qur'an also suggests that Jesus is blessed and honoured by God (Surah 3:45), protected from Satan from birth (Surah 3:31) and blessed with a special birth (Surah 7:171-172). Furthermore, from the Arabic word *msh* which means “to touch”, the *Messiah* is seen as “one whose

⁵⁶³ Ibid, p151

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid, p191-194

⁵⁶⁵ Alister McGrath. *Christian Theology*. 1997, p324

⁵⁶⁶ Walter C. Kaiser. *The Messiah in the Old Testament*. 1995, p155-199

touch purifies from all faults, being himself provided with protection from the divine and anointed with the blessed oil (Surah 3:43, 49)".⁵⁶⁷ Thus, when one considers the above text, one could say that the title *Messiah* in the Qur'an is not just a loose title but conveys the precise identity of Jesus as the anointed prophet of Allah who was very faithful to the task given to him by Allah.

We stated in chapter four concerning Adam and the fall that Allah forgave Adam after the fall and made him his first prophet. Islam therefore has no concept of sin and redemption similar to the fundamental Christian view of fallen humanity and its need for redemption.⁵⁶⁸ So, what will the *Messiah* in Islam be saving, when there is nothing to save except to provide guidance on the straight path to Allah? In Christianity however, the fall of Adam (original sin) brought depravity to the entirety of humanity, for which sinful humanity could not save itself unless through a sinless one. It therefore took the sinlessness of Jesus Christ to save sinful humanity. This gives the title a soteriological significance in Christianity.

Thus, Ayoub concludes that "the Christ of Muslim piety has continued to be a living personality, humble and pious, forever thundering against the wrongs of society".⁵⁶⁹ The question then is: what could be learnt from the identity of Jesus as *Messiah* in Islam and in Christianity? It is here that a focus on the message of Jesus in the Qur'an and in the NT becomes significant for dialogue as an exercise in earning. As a prophet in Islam, Jesus' message on the *Tawhid* contributes to guiding humanity from all error by guiding them in the practice of true submission to the One God. As Ayoub conceived, "by his message, Jesus helped to save humanity from all error and guided its steps further on the path to God, to whom all belong and to whom we shall all return (Surah 2:156)".⁵⁷⁰ As the "Son of God" in Christianity, Jesus' message in the Gospels does not only provide guidance on how to live morally good lives, but his death and resurrection brought redemption for all Christians. How can the messages of Jesus the *Messiah* be a context for

⁵⁶⁷ Parrinder. *Jesus in the Qur'an*. 1965, p31

⁵⁶⁸ Irfan Omar (ed.). *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue by Mahmoud Ayoub*. 2007, p137

⁵⁶⁹ Mahmoud Ayoub. "Towards an Islamic Christology," 1976, p163

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid, p137

Christian-Muslim dialogue of life and dialogue of common action? Chapter six will serve as the response to this question.

5.2.2. Jesus as Ruh (Spirit) of/from Allah

According to Parrinder, even though the encyclopaedia of Islam reports that the Qur'anic use of the term *Spirit* is a bit obscure, *Spirit* is used seven times in the Qur'an (some examples are Surah 2:87, 4:171, 5:110, 19:17 and Surah 21:91) in reference to Jesus.⁵⁷¹ In some of these verses, Jesus is referred to as a Spirit from Allah. Among the six prophets who are dignified with special titles⁵⁷² Jesus is identified as "the Spirit of God". What does this designation mean in Islam? For the modern Islamic commentator Yusuf Ali, it means "Christ was a spirit proceeding from God".⁵⁷³ For S. M. Seale, "It means the spirit was sent to him by divine command".⁵⁷⁴ But, in Samuel Schlorff's view, "Spirit from Allah" should not be seen in divine terms because the Qur'anic understanding of the Holy Spirit is different from the Biblical deification of him. According to Schlorff, even though the Qur'an makes references to the Spirit in terms such as the "Holy Spirit" (Ruh-al-Qudus – Surah 2:87), "a Spirit from Allah" (Surah 4:171), "a Faithful Spirit" (al-Ruh-al-almin – Surah 26:193), these are not symmetrical to Christian theological understanding of the Holy Spirit. Islam identifies the Holy Spirit as Gabriel the Angel of revelation who strengthens and guides the prophets and messengers of Allah.⁵⁷⁵

In the commentaries on Surah 2:87, 2:253 and 5:110 in chapter four, al-Tabari, al-Zamakhshari and al-Razi helped us understand the relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit (the Angel Gabriel) who is God's messenger of revelation. In Islam, Angels are not divine beings but are created by God from pure light, to serve God as his messengers.⁵⁷⁶ Consequently, the Angel Gabriel is not a divine being, but a messenger of God's revelation to his prophets. Since the Qur'an reports that Jesus was supported by the Holy Spirit from

⁵⁷¹ Parrinder. *Jesus in the Qur'an*. 1965, p48

⁵⁷² According to Parrinder, the six were dignified with special titles are: Adam is the "Chosen of God" (*Safiy Allah*), Noah is the "Prophet of God" (*Nabi Allah*), Abraham is the "Friend of God" (*Khalil Allah*), Moses is the "Converser with God" (*Kalim Allah*), and Jesus is the "Spirit of God" (*Ruh Allah*) (Ibid, p40)

⁵⁷³ Yusuf Ali Abdullah. "Commentary on the Qur'an." Lahore, 1934, p234.

⁵⁷⁴ M. S. Seale. *Muslim Theology: a Study of Origins with Reference to Church Fathers*. 1964, p111.

⁵⁷⁵ Samuel Schlorff. "The Theological and Apologetical Dimensions of Muslim Evangelization" in *Westminster Theological Journal*. Vol. 42 (1986), p352-353

⁵⁷⁶ Sachiko Murata & Williams C. Chittick. 1994, p84-89

cradle to his final end, one would imagine that God's favour was continuously with him from the moment of his birth to his final exaltation. Hence, al-Tabarsi could state emphatically that if it is asked why Jesus was specially mentioned among all the prophets as being supported by Gabriel, even though every prophet was also supported by him, it would be because "Gabriel accompanied him from his youth to his final end."⁵⁷⁷

Consequently, to say that Jesus is the "Spirit of/from God" carries no divine connotations. It rather emphasizes on the one hand, how Jesus came to be born through Allah's express command (Be! and he was Surah 19:35) and on the other, how he was continually supported by the Angel Gabriel from the cradle to his final exaltation. As al-Zamakhshari indicated, the understanding of Jesus as the spirit of Allah only point to the fact that Jesus came into being through a special intervention of Allah without human seed or substance.⁵⁷⁸ According to al-Zamakhshari, since the Holy Spirit is the pure breath of Allah (symbolizing purity), then His presence in the life of Jesus from beginning to end suggests that Jesus' whole life was marked by purity (the absence of sin and wrongdoing) and hence could be called the Spirit of God.

From the perspective of Christian faith and theology, even though one does not find references to Jesus as a Spirit of/from God, the Synoptic Gospels also present a picture of Jesus Christ which depicts his relationship with the Holy Spirit. For instance, Mt1:18 reports how through the power of the Holy Spirit, Mary was to conceive and bear a son. Though the Gospel of Mark has no narrative on the annunciation it does report of the descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus at his baptism (Mk 1:10). It was the same Holy Spirit who drove Jesus into the wilderness and supported him during his temptation (Mk1:12-13). Thus, Mona Hooker indicates that though Mark does not report of the outcome of the temptation in the way Matthew and Luke do, what is clear is that Jesus was victorious over the devil through the support he received from the Holy Spirit. In this way, "his future actions and words would be governed by the Spirit, not by Satan".⁵⁷⁹ Thus, the descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus at his Baptism (Lk 3:22) and the working of the Holy Spirit in his

⁵⁷⁷ Al-Tabarsi Vol. 1, p249 quoted in Ayoub, Mahmoud. 1984, p124-125

⁵⁷⁸ O'Shaughnessy. (Table V – Spirit Sense group E) 1953, p65

⁵⁷⁹ Morna D. Hooker. "Who Can This Be?" 2005, 83

ministry (Lk 4:14-18), demonstrate that the Holy Spirit was continually active in the ministry of Jesus Christ from the beginning to the end.

However, unlike Islam which identifies the Holy Spirit as the Angel Gabriel, Christian faith and theology identifies the Holy Spirit here as a divine being, the third person of the Holy Trinity. Whereas the Islamic obligation to the *Tawhid* asserts the unity and transcendence of God and forbids the association of God to other beings, the Christian experience of God as Creator (the Father), as Redeemer (Jesus Christ) and as Sanctifier (the Holy Spirit), provides the context for conceptualizing God as One in three divine persons., Thus, for Christian faith and theology, the Holy Spirit who is active in the ministry of Jesus Christ from the beginning to the end was none other than the third person of the Holy Trinity, a divine Being.

It could therefore be said that in Islam, the understanding that the Holy Spirit who emanates from God was constantly at work in Jesus' life and ministry is worth noting, though the Holy Spirit here is identified as the Angel Gabriel. In Christianity too, even though the Holy Spirit is identified as the third person of the Holy Trinity, one nonetheless finds him actively involved in the ministry of Jesus, the "*Messiah*, the son of God". So in both the Qur'an and in the New Testament, one finds that the Holy Spirit though understood differently, nonetheless supported Jesus in the task he performed as a "prophet of Allah" in Islam and as the "Son of God" in Christianity. If the Holy Spirit emanates from God (as messenger in Islam and as proceeding from God as the third person of the Trinity); then it could be said that all that Jesus said and did in the Qur'an and in the NT had God's divine approval. In this way, what then can Muslims and Christians learn from the message and exemplary life of Jesus (as prophet and as Son of God) for their living relationships? While this question would be attended to in chapter six, let us investigate into the meaning of Jesus as the "Word from God or Word of God" in Islam and in Christianity.

5.2.3. Jesus as the "Word from God" or "Word of God" (*Kalimatim-minallah*)

Two of the texts that refer to Jesus as "a Word from Allah" are: "the Angel said, Mary, God gives you news of a Word from Him, whose name will be the *Messiah*, Jesus, the son

of Mary who will be held in honour in this world and the next...” (Surah 3:45); and “People of the Book, do not go to excess in your religion and do not say anything about God except the truth: the *Messiah*, Jesus, Son of Mary, was nothing more than a messenger of God, His Word directed to Mary and a Spirit from Him” (Surah 4:171). The key word for our interest here is: *Kalimatuhun* (His Word). What does this mean?

From the ordinary sense of the phrase – if “His” here refers to Allah, then “His Word” means that Jesus is in some unique way, God’s own Word. This sense of the word becomes clearer when Surah 3:45 is considered in the light of Surah 3:39: “the Angel called out to him (Zachariah), while he stood praying in the sanctuary: God gives you news of John (Yahya) who will confirm a Word from God” (*kalimatim-minallah*). So, if the same Angel announces the conception of Jesus to Mary as “*kalimatim-minhu*” (a Word from Him) in Surah 3:45, then one could say that Jesus is God’s Word whom John heralds. But what does Jesus as “*kalimatim-minallah*” (A Word from God) mean in Islam?

It must be said that the Qur’anic understanding of Jesus as a Word from Allah or the Word of God is not synonymous to the Johannine logos Christological understanding.⁵⁸⁰ Though the tendency is for Christian scholars to conclude in Johannine christological terms that the title “Word from God or Word of God” (Surah 3:39 and 3:45) means that Jesus is the “incarnate word of God,”⁵⁸¹ one needs to understand this title in the light of Surah 4:171. In this text the Qur’an is unequivocal in its definition of the identity of Jesus – “People of the Book, do not go to excess in your religion and do not say anything about God except the truth: the *Messiah*, Jesus, Son of Mary, was nothing more than a messenger of God...” This text, coupled with the overall Islamic obligation to the *Tawhid*, implies that the title of Jesus as “a Word from God or the Word of God” could not be construed in logos Christological terms. Having said this, what interpretations do Muslim commentators give to this seemingly dense christological title?

Among the Qur’anic interpreters, Yusuf Ali focuses attention on Surah 3:39 and 3:45 finding explanations to the designation of Jesus as “a Word from God” in Surah 3:59 where the Qur’an says: “In God’s eyes, Jesus is just like Adam. He created him from dust

⁵⁸⁰ See John 1:1-3

⁵⁸¹ See O'Shaughnessy. *The Koranic Concept of the Word of God*, p. 1948, p56

and said to him, ‘Be,’ and he was (.Kun fayakuun)”. According to Yusuf, this text implies that Adam and Jesus were both created by the single word of God.⁵⁸² Hence, if divinity can be derived from this notion of Jesus as the “Word from God”, then Adam could be considered divine as well. For Yusuf, to say that Jesus is a “Word from Allah” does not imply that he is the pre-existent Word of God *per* the Johannine Logos Christology. It means that Jesus is a messenger of God, created for a special purpose. In al-Baydawi’s view too, Jesus is referred to as “a word from God” because he came into being without a Father. For al-Razi, Jesus was called “word of God” because he was created by the express command of Allah: “Be and he was”. Other commentators also think that Jesus is referred to as “a Word from God” because he came as the effect of the word of God which He cast upon Mary. Thus, al-Tabari remarks that ““God calls this son which is in thy womb his word.””⁵⁸³

Though there may be divergent views as to what this phrase (a Word from God) definitively means in Islam, it is noteworthy that each of these views renders an interpretation that honours and respects the uniqueness of Jesus, devoid of divine connotations. Hence, many Islamic commentaries on the designation of Jesus as “a Word from God” converge on the meaning associated to Surah 19:35 in which God creates by simply saying: “‘Be!’ and it is”. In other words, Jesus is referred to as “a Word from God” because he came into being through the creative Word of God. Hence, many agree that Jesus was created uniquely through Allah’s divine command just as Adam was created (Surah 3:59). However, Jesus is different from Adam in that whereas Adam is partially created from dust and disobeyed God at some point in history (Surah 7:19-23), Jesus was created not from dust but by the Word of God cast upon Mary and he never disobeyed the commands of Allah.

Besides, nowhere in the Qur’an is the designation “Word from God” used to describe any of the prophets except for Jesus. This exclusive use of the phrase in reference to Jesus suggests that there must be something more about the person of Jesus himself that warrants this exclusivity. In some sense, could it be because Jesus is the only prophet of

⁵⁸² Yusuf Ali Abdullah. *The Holy Qur’an*. 2001, p132

⁵⁸³ Al-Tabari quoted in Parrinder, G. 1965, p47

Allah who is known to have been gifted with the *Injil*, the Torah and the Wisdom (Surah 3:48) at the same time? In the Qur'an, none of the messengers of God is known to have taught all these scriptures which are known to be from God (God's Word). Hence, if the Qur'an (Surah 3:48) reports that "God will teach him (Jesus) the Scriptures and Wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel", then Jesus by this very fact, possessed in considerable measure the "Word from God" or "Word of God" in a unique way. In Islam, this uniqueness does not point to his divinity, but to his role as a faithful prophet of Allah.

Within the context of the NT, "Word of God" (the *Logos*) is one of the most significant titles designated to Jesus Christ. Though Jesus as the *Logos* is not used elaborately in the Synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of John uses this title in unequivocal terms: "In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. And the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him" (John 1:1-2). According to Parrinder, linking the Logos to creation takes us back to the creation story in the book of Genesis where creation came into being through the creative Word of God.⁵⁸⁴ Though the word Logos is the Greek derivative of the Hebrew *Dābār* (Word) Logos was first used by Philo of Alexandria to refer to "the Divine Reason, intermediate between God and the world".⁵⁸⁵ However, in the Johannine account, *Logos* is not used in the sense that Philo used it. Here, it refers to God himself who pre-existed creation and hence does not belong to the created order. It is this Logos which became incarnated in Jesus Christ – "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

In consequence, Christian faith and theology holds that by virtue of the incarnation, the Word of God (Jesus) became flesh through the conception of the Virgin Mary. After the incarnation Jesus Christ as the "Word of God", retained two natures: the human and the divine, in one prosopon (person). As McGrath intimated, within Christian faith and theology "the importance of the confession 'Jesus is Lord' is not only that Jesus is divine, but that God is Christ-like".⁵⁸⁶ For Abdul-Haqq, there is no doubt as to the identity of Jesus as the "Word from God" whom John came to announce to Israel. In the expression "Word from Him", the participle (from) "Min" signifies a generic relationship between the

⁵⁸⁴ "And God said; Let there be..." (Genesis 1:3-25)

⁵⁸⁵ Parrinder. *Jesus in the Qur'an*. 1965, p47

⁵⁸⁶ Alister E. McGrath. *Christian Theology*. 1997, p323

noun and pronoun linked together by it. Therefore it means that “the Word” is of the same divine essence as Him (hun) - God.⁵⁸⁷ For Samuel Zwemer, if Christ in Christianity were a mere Word from God then it would be clear that He was only one expression of God’s will. But since God Himself calls Him “the Word of God” it is clear that He must be the one and only perfect expression of God's will and the only perfect manifestation of God.⁵⁸⁸ So, in Christianity, to say that Jesus Christ is the “Word of God” is to admit that this Jesus is divine: truly God and truly Man, the second person of the Holy Trinity.

Having considered the Islamic and the Christian understandings of the title “Word from God or Word of God”, we could conclude that the title is exclusively designated to Jesus in both the Qur’an and the Gospel of John. However, while it is interpreted in Islam as emphasizing the unique creation of Jesus through Allah’s divine command – “Be and it is”, (Surah 19: 35); in Christianity, Jesus Christ as the “Word of God” relates to the incarnation in which Jesus in his pre-existence took on human form and was born of the Blessed Virgin Mary (God with us). Here, he is not created by God but predates creation and is the source of it. Having said this, what can we learn from these two forms of Christologizing about Jesus on the basis of the “Word of God Word from God” title?

Since Islam understands that Jesus is a messenger of Allah, we know that every messenger of Allah is sent with a message that emphasizes on the human obligation to observe the *Tawhid*.⁵⁸⁹ In Christianity however, Jesus Christ is the “proclaimed word” i.e. the incarnate Word. Consequently, whether understood as a bearer of God’s Word (the messenger in Islam) or the content of that very Word (the Incarnate Word in Christianity), Jesus still provides guidance to all who seek to submit themselves to God through his message. Thus, it could be asked: If Jesus is viewed as the “Word from Allah” in the Qur’an and the “Word of God” in the Gospels, what is the message of Jesus for Christians and Muslims in terms of “submission to God” and issues relating to social justice? Do these provide contexts for Christian-Muslim dialogue of life and the dialogue of common action?

⁵⁸⁷ Abdul-Haqq, Adbiyah Akhbar. *Sharing Your Faith with a Muslim*. 1980, p68

⁵⁸⁸ Samuel Zwemer. *The Moslim Christ*. 1912, p37

⁵⁸⁹ See V.G. Cornell. “Tawhid: The Recognition of the One in Islam,” in Hans Kung and Jürgen Moltmann (eds). *Islam: A Challenge for Christianity*. 1994, p61

In conclusion, it must be said that the purpose for engaging in this brief work of critical correlation on the above Christological titles (*Messiah*, Spirit of God and Word from God) is to give an overview of the differences that exist between the Islamic and Christian interpretations of the titles and the meanings that are associated with them as a result of these interpretations. In the course of doing this, the critical analysis opened up some significant questions some of which include: as *Messiah*, how can the messages of Jesus in the Qur'an and the Gospels become contexts for Christian-Muslim dialogue of life and dialogue of common action? As Spirit of/from God, what can Muslims and Christians learn from the message and exemplary life of Jesus, for their mutual relationships? As the Word of/from God, what is this message of Jesus for Christians and Muslims in respect of the submission to the will of God and the pursuit of issues of social justice? While these questions will be attended to in chapter six, they nonetheless demonstrate how the identity and mission of Jesus have the potential to stimulate Christians-Muslim conversations about fidelity to God and the response to issues of social justice.

5.3. Jesus Christ as *Bridge* and *Barrier* to Christian-Muslim Dialogue

So far, we have seen that the problem between Christians and Muslims is the divinity of Jesus Christ. For Christians, Jesus Christ is the Son of God and saviour of the world. But for Muslims, he is only a messenger of Allah whose task was to provide right guidance to the people of the Book. This context of claim and counterclaim on the identity and mission of Jesus, makes Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology a daunting task. Thus, Beaumont conceives that unless Muslims develop a more dynamic concept of the transcendence of God, they will never admit to the Christian notion of the divinity of Christ. "Muslims for their part are pleased when Christians give up the idea of divine presence in Christ and presumably hope that more Christians will follow Hick's example".⁵⁹⁰

While the identity and mission of Jesus still remains contentious in Christian-Muslim circles, some scholars propose that a focus on the ethics of Jesus would help lighten the tensions that exist between Christians and Muslims when it comes to dialogue

⁵⁹⁰ Mark Beaumont. *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims*. 2005, p210

about him. But as we indicated in chapter four, Christian-Muslim dialogue on the ethics of Jesus will not be more straightforward than dialogue on his status because the authority of his teachings may have to be faced when a clash between his teachings and Islamic tradition emerge. As Beaumont puts it, “whether Muslims will be prepared to grant him the authority to challenge Islamic norms is a difficult question to answer”.⁵⁹¹

However, the understanding that dialogue on Christology must begin first from the status of Jesus and then proceed to his ethics makes sense. This is because Jesus did what he succeeded in doing because of who he was. So, if Christians and Muslims want to have a dialogue which reflects an honest engagement intended for the benefit of learning from and about the other, then it must begin from who they each construe Jesus to be. Islam may deny the doctrines of the incarnation, the death and resurrection of Jesus, but it also has accounts which concern the “Virginal Conception”, the “miracles Jesus performed”, the “Ascension” and the “Second Coming”. Since these events concern Jesus Christ, one could say that this Jesus appears to be both *barrier* and *bridge* in Christian-Muslim relations. Whereas the *barrier* represents that which divides them christologically, the *bridge* underscores the common christological themes they share. To engage in dialogue as an exercise in learning, one needs to know the meanings of these themes in their tradition-specific contexts and the lessons they may offer Christian-Muslim dialogue of life and the dialogue of common action. Let us investigate into the Christological themes which we heuristically refer to as *bridge* and *barrier* to Christian-Muslim relations.

5.3.1. Jesus as *Barrier* to Dialogue

The meaning of the concept *barrier* can either be seen in physical or non-physical terms. It is viewed in a physical sense when it refers to “a set of object(s) used to separate, demarcate or barricade a passage from one point to another”. From this sense, we can think of a fence, a highway *barrier* or a roadblock. From the non-physical perspective, a *barrier* can also mean “a regulation that is intended to set apart and differentiate one thing from another”. Here, we can think of the ethics of a profession, rules of courtesy, religious rules and doctrines and so forth. From these two definitions we could say that the goal of

⁵⁹¹ Ibid, p211

every barrier is to maintain the status-quo, to regulate conduct, to maintain law and order or ensure the maintenance of originality or particularity. Hence, barriers pose no problems once one respects and observes that which they seek to preserve. Situating this within the context of Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology, *barrier* here is used as a heuristic device intended to help us understand the christological issues which seem to set a dividing line between the Christian and the Muslim way of theologizing about Jesus.

Hence, to say that Jesus remains a *barrier* to Christian-Muslim dialogue is to maintain that there are stark differences in the way Christians and Muslims theologize about Jesus of Nazareth. These differences need to be respected. As we indicated in chapter four, while Islamic Christology is guided by its obligation to the *Tawhid*, the Christian view of Jesus Christ as “Son of God” finds its meaning in the Christian experience of God as Trinity. Thus, the context of *Tawhid* and Trinity set the parenthesis within which Christology finds its articulation in Islam and Christianity respectively. In this way, the *Tawhid* and the Trinity define the barriers within which the Qur’anic Jesus and Jesus of the NT are to be understood. Two of these barriers are: Jesus as the Son of God and death and resurrection of Jesus. The emphasis here is that, for dialogue as an exercise in learning to succeed, the barriers that separate the religions need to be respected. Let us delve into some of these barriers.

5.3.1.1. The Holy Trinity and *Tawhid*

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is a theological articulation of the Christian experience of God as One in three divine persons – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. These three divine persons are distinct, but are of one substance, one essence or one nature. While their personhood focuses on who they are, their nature defines what they are.⁵⁹² Thus, the three persons of the Holy Trinity are said to be distinct from one another in their relations of origin, but co-equal, consubstantial and co-eternal in their nature.⁵⁹³ But the basic question is: how can God be *One* and at the same time *Three*? It is this same question that continues to vex every theological discourse on the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Whereas the effort here is to emphasize that the Holy Trinity is the central non-

⁵⁹² The Catechism of the Catholic Church # 252 (Hereafter CCC).

⁵⁹³ CCC, #253

negotiable mystery of Christian faith and life, we shall do this by briefly addressing questions which relate to: how God revealed himself through the mystery of the Holy Trinity and how the Church articulated this revelation.

First of all, it must be said that the Christian experience and knowledge of God is informed by two premises: the knowledge of who God is and what God has done. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, these two areas are distinguished as *theologia* (theology) and *oikonomia* (economy). Whereas *theologia* refers to the mystery of God's innermost life, *oikonomia* refers to all the work by which God reveals and communicates his life. In this way, "God's works reveal who he is in himself and the mystery of his inmost being enlightens our understanding of all his works... A person discloses himself in his actions and the better we know a person, the better we understand his actions".⁵⁹⁴ Thus, through the *oikonomia*, the *theologia* is revealed to us, while the *theologia* illuminates the whole *oikonomia*.

But how did God reveal himself to Christians as Trinity and how did the Church articulate this revelation? From the onset, it must be said that God is Holy Mystery. This means that God cannot be fully and absolutely comprehended by the human mind (reason). His incomprehensibility defines him as God. Consequently, Christian faith and theology perceives the Holy Trinity (the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit) as part of the mystery of God who is partially known through what he chooses to reveal. Thus, the Holy Trinity comes as part of that which God chose to make known to the Christian Church. Just as in some religions God is called Father so also in the OT: Israel referred to God as Father because he created the world and sustains it (Deut 32:6). By the establishment of the covenant between God and Israel, Israel was known as God's 'first born son' (Exodus 4:22). Besides, God was known to be the Father of the kings of Israel, Father of the poor, the widowed and orphans.⁵⁹⁵ So by calling God "Father", the language of faith indicates two main things: that God is the first origin of everything and transcends everything that exists.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church. #236

⁵⁹⁵ CCC, #238

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid, #239

Through the testimonies of Jesus Christ, God is further revealed not only as Father in the sense of being creator, but also in the sense of being eternally Father in relation to his son who is also eternally son in relation to his Father.⁵⁹⁷ For this reason, Jesus affirms that “No one knows the Son except the Father and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matthew 11:27). Not only does Jesus express the connection between him and the Father as based on his knowledge of him but in John 10:30 and 17:21, Jesus affirms that he and the Father are one. It is this eternal being of the Father and the Son which is expressed in the prologue of John’s Gospel (John 1:1) – “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God”.

Reflecting on the John 10:30 and 17:21, while Mullins affirms that Jesus’ prayer in John 17:21 was intended as a special gift for his disciples which was a life of intimacy with God, this gift nonetheless reflects the communion between Jesus himself and his Father. According to Mullins, this communion is “not a matter then, of simple union of a moral kind, but a unity at the level of being; a unity that has as its model and permanent source, the oneness of the Father and the son”.⁵⁹⁸ It is on the basis of this oneness (consubstantiation) that the councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381) affirmed Jesus Christ as “the only-begotten Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father”.⁵⁹⁹

In Christian faith and theology therefore, even though it is acknowledged that God has revealed himself in many and diverse ways, Jesus Christ is known to be the definitive revelation of God to humanity. As Walter Kasper puts it, “the fact that the one God has once only, yet wholly, definitively and unreservedly communicated himself historically in Jesus Christ is the basic conviction of the Fathers of the church reflected in the church’s ancient tradition”.⁶⁰⁰ Consequently, in Jesus Christ resides the Christian experience of the fullness of God’s revelation to humanity.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid, #240

⁵⁹⁸ See Michael Mullins. *The Gospel of John*. 2003, p351

⁵⁹⁹ See J. Stevenson. *Creeds, Councils and Controversies*. 2003, p114-115

⁶⁰⁰ Walter Kasper. “The Uniqueness and Universality of Jesus Christ.” 2004, p16

In John 14:16, shortly before his Passover, Jesus announced the coming of the Holy Spirit as Paraclete (Advocate) to the disciples – “I will ask the Father and he will give you another Paraclete to be with you forever”. According to Mullins, when Jesus promised to send another Paraclete, he spoke in terms of “another Paraclete” which suggests that the latter Paraclete will be performing the same function or carrying out the same agenda as the former.⁶⁰¹ Who is the former Paraclete and what was his function?

For Mullins, the concept *Paraclete* has different meanings in the Hebrew and in the Greco-Roman traditions and the Johannine presentation draws on both senses. In the Hebrew sense, it refers to the biblical tradition in which God is said to be the comforter or consoler of Israel (See Isaiah 52:12). Jesus also introduces himself as the one who offers this comfort – “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, he has anointed me and sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken” (Luke 4:18-25). So for Mullins, Paracletesis means “comforting actions, words and writings”.⁶⁰² Here, if “God is the first *Paraclete*, comforting the people through word and deed. Jesus is by implication, a *Paraclete* in his acting and speaking on behalf of the Father”.⁶⁰³

From the Greco-Roman sense, Mullins asserts that “a Paraclete is seen in terms of a legal advisor, helper or advocate in court”.⁶⁰⁴ For Mullins, as Jesus encountered trials and called witnesses like the Father, John the Baptist and the Scriptures to his defence, so he envisaged that his disciples would also encounter trials and would need the support of a helper or an advocate. Jesus’ promise of this helper, whom he called the Spirit of truth, shall come from the Father (John 14:26) just as he came from the Father. His task will not just be to comfort them but also, “to prepare and instruct them for their role as disciples and witnesses after Jesus’ lifetime”.⁶⁰⁵ In this way the phrase “another Paraclete”, implies that the Holy Spirit was going to perform the same function or carry out the same agenda as Jesus did. Hence, the Catechism of the Catholic Church says: “having previously

⁶⁰¹ Michael Mullins. *The Gospel of John*. 2003, p324

⁶⁰² Michael Mullins. *The Gospel of John*. 2003, p325

⁶⁰³ Ibid, p325

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid, p325-326

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid, p327

‘spoken through the prophets,’ the Spirit will now be with and in the disciples, to teach them and guide them ‘into all the truth.’”⁶⁰⁶

If the Holy Spirit is equal to this task, then he must share the same being with the Father and Jesus to be able to accomplish this function. Since the being of the Father and the Son is divine, then the Holy Spirit is revealed as another divine person (another Paraclete) with Jesus and the Father. Thus, the Catechism of the Catholic Church could say that “the eternal origin of the Holy Spirit is revealed in his mission in time. The Spirit is sent to the apostles and to the Church both by the Father in the name of the Son and by the Son in person, once he had returned to the Father” (CCC #244). In this way, one begins to see a clearer picture of the mystery of the Holy Trinity in the faith experience of the Church. Even though the Holy Trinity as a concept, cannot be found in the Christian Scriptures, the Christian experience of God as three persons in one God, supported the use of the Latin word *Trinitas* (meaning triad or threefold) as defining this Christian experience.

From the perspective of *oikonomia* (the functions of the Holy Trinity), God the Father is said to be the creator of all things, God the Son (Jesus Christ) is the redeemer of creation and God the Holy Spirit is the sanctifier of creation; and yet the whole drama of creation, redemption and sanctification is seen as a single operation common to them.⁶⁰⁷ Hence, this experience of God as Trinity in the early Church reflected its usage of the trinitarian formulation in blessings and baptisms (Mt 28:19). Evidence of God working as Trinity in Scripture goes back to the beginning of creation in the Genesis account where God created the world by His Word. In doing this, Gen 1:2 says that “the Spirit of God hovered over the waters”. In this account, the Church sees the Creator as God the Father, the creative Word as God the Son and the hovering Spirit as God the Holy Spirit.

There are other biblical evidences which further support the Church’s belief in the Holy Trinity. For instance, at the baptism of Jesus in the prologue of Mark 1:9-11 the Holy Spirit came upon him in the form of a dove and a voice from heaven said; “this is my

⁶⁰⁶ CCC #243

⁶⁰⁷ “From the beginning, the revealed truth of the Holy Trinity has always been at the very root of the Church’s living faith, principally, by means of baptism, It finds its expression in the rule of baptismal faith, formulated in the preaching, catechesis and prayers of the church” (CCC #249)

beloved Son in whom I am well pleased”. As we indicated earlier, the mystery of the Holy Trinity is the central mystery of the Christian life and faith. Christians are baptized “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”. Hence, Christian faith rests on the Holy Trinity; as it represents the Christian experience of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

However, within the Islamic context, the obligation to the *Tawhid* (there is no god but one God - Surah 5:73) expresses the Islamic monotheistic experience of God. For Islam, God is the source of creation and transcends everything in the world. Everything is nothing but subject to Him as His creatures. Thus, the first part of the Shahada which contains the sentence of the *Tawhid* states that “there is no god but God” (*La ilaha illa Allah*). For Murata and Chittick, this means that “There is only a single true and worthy object of worship, God. All other objects of worship and service are false. To serve anything else is to fall into error and misguidance”.⁶⁰⁸ For Muslims, to conceive anything as equal to Allah is to commit *Shirk*. Here, the Qur’an states that “Do not associate others with God; to associate others with God is a mighty wrong” (Surah 31:13).

So, the avoidance of associating others with God is a central nerve in the message of the Qur’an. *Shirk* is therefore nothing but the reversal of the *Tawhid* and a reversed *Tawhid* leads to the annihilation of Islam. This is why the theological formulation of God as Holy Trinity is perceived by Islam as unacceptable. The Qur’an says: “Those who say that God is a third of three are truth-concealers” (Surah 5:73). In relation to Jesus the Qur’an warns, “the *Messiah*, Jesus, son of Mary is only the messenger of God... So have faith in God and do not say, ‘Three.’ Refrain... God is only One God” (Surah 4:171). These texts therefore reaffirm the fundamental Islamic faith principle which lies at the heart the *Tawhid*. One would even find Jesus in the Qur’an affirming this oneness of God when he said: “God is my Lord and your Lord, so serve Him – that is the straight path” (Surah 3:51).

So, when the Qur’an criticises followers of other religions, it very often does so on the basis of a perceived distortion to the *Tawhid*. Here, the Christian concept of Holy

⁶⁰⁸ Sachiko Murata & Williams C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. 1994, p49

Trinity is but one of such examples. Since the Trinity and the *Tawhid* touch the core of the Christian and Islamic belief-systems respectively, Christian-Muslim dialogue as an exercise in learning offers the opportunity for the interlocutors to understand why each tradition construe Jesus the way they do. With such mutual understandings, the interlocutors may find themselves in better positions to respect and appreciate the views of the other. When the interlocutors begin to show genuine respect for the traditions of the other as a result of dialogue, then the dialogue could be considered as successful on the basis of its goal.

5.3.1.2. Jesus as the “Son of God”

In our discourse in chapter four concerning the identity of Jesus as the “Son of God”, we asserted that this designation is not to be taken literally as God physically generating a son, but metaphorically as establishing the intimate relationship between Jesus Christ and God the Father. As James Dunn indicated, “when Christianity came to grapple with defining Jesus’ relationship with God, it was son of the Father that emerged as the consensus way of doing so”.⁶⁰⁹ According to Dunn, the reasons for this christological designation were first of all because Jesus saw the relationship between him and God as a “Father-son” one. His prayer to God as “Abba Father” (Mk 14:36) is evocative of the language of family intimacy. Reference to this “Father-son relationship” is very dense in John 17:1-24. Secondly, Dunn intimates that the designation “son of God” was used by the early Christians in their prayers and liturgy. Here, it became a source of inspiration to them in the sense that by their faith in Jesus, they believed that they too were sharing in the same sense of sonship that ‘Abba’ expressed.⁶¹⁰

In consequence, if one takes Dunn’s views into consideration, the conclusion one may reach is that the designation “son of God” was Jesus’ way of expressing his relationship with God, as well as a unique way in which the early Christians interpreted their faith relationship with God (Rom 8:17). Thus, the notion of divine sonship is not literal in the sense of God begetting a son, since the Church unequivocally declared its stand on this matter against the Arians in the Council of Nicaea (325 A.D). In Nicaea, the

⁶⁰⁹ James, D. G. Dunn. *New Testament Theology*. 2009, p58

⁶¹⁰ James, D. G. Dunn. *New Testament Theology*. 2009, p58-59

Church categorically declaimed the non-orthodoxy of any theological constructions that suggest the physical generation of Jesus by the Father.⁶¹¹ Hence, the divine sonship of Jesus is not literal but metaphorical.

In a particularly Islamic context, the charge of Islam against Christianity on the above designation in the Qur'an is that: "The *Messiah*, Jesus, son of Mary, was only the messenger of Allah... God is only one; He is far above having a son" (Surah 4:171). A clearer Qur'anic charge on this designation is also found in Surah 9:30. It is significant to note here that the *Tawhid* remains the bedrock against which the designation of Jesus as "son of God" is interpreted. As al-Tabari (923 A.D) puts it, "the naming of Jesus as God's son undermines the unity of God. By introducing concepts of Fatherhood and sonship, Christians...reduce God's freedom and power".⁶¹² For al-Razi, it takes away "some of the greatness from God because he would have to carry some of the seed of his Father".⁶¹³ Hence, al-Razi suggested that it might be more appropriate for Christians to refer to Jesus as "the servant of God" instead of "God's son". The prophet Muhammad also stated his disbelief in the divine sonship when he said in the Qur'an: "if the Lord of Mercy had a son, I will be the first to worship him, but blessed be the Lord... He is far above their false descriptions" (Surah 43:81-82).

From the above verses, one gets the strong impression that Muslims understand the Christian conception of the "divine sonship of Jesus", not in symbolic or metaphoric terms, but in the sense of biological generation. Even though this constitute the way Muslims presents the Christian view of Jesus' identity as "Son of God", dialogue as an exercise in learning offers Christians the opportunity to clarify their beliefs in the divine sonship of Jesus Christ to Muslims. Through these clarifications, the Muslim who understands the metaphoricity of the Christian interpretation of the "divine sonship" may find himself/herself in a completely different place than those who still conceive that the Christian understanding of the divine sonship is literally interpreted.

⁶¹¹ J.N.D Kelly. *Early Christian Doctrines*. 2007, p232

⁶¹² Al-Tabari quoted in Beaumont, Mark. *Christology in Dialogue with Islam*. 2005, p8

⁶¹³ Al-Razi quoted in Beaumont, Mark. *Christology in Dialogue with Islam*. 2005, p8

Mahmoud Ayoub did challenge the Islamic interpretation of the Christian belief in the divine sonship as implying biological generation. For him, the Qur'an does not use the term *walad* (offspring)⁶¹⁴ to refer to Jesus, but *ittakhadha* (took unto himself),⁶¹⁵ and *ittakhadha* does not suggest the physical generation of Jesus, but a relationship of adoption.⁶¹⁶ Ayoub then concluded that "the Qur'an nowhere accuses Christians of calling Jesus the walad of God".⁶¹⁷ If Muslims cling to this interpretation, it does not find support in the Qur'an. While Ayoub's contribution appears to resolve the matter, one wonders whether the majority of Muslims share this understanding and whether it truly captures the Qur'anic response to the divine sonship (Surah 4:171 and 19:35). So, dialogue as an exercise in learning therefore offers Christians and Muslims the opportunity to clarify the Christian position on the divine sonship and the Muslim response to it.

In conclusion, we could say that Christian faith and theology understands the reality of Jesus' divine sonship as only an expression of the intimate relationship between him and God.⁶¹⁸ This relationship is fully expressed in the Trinity, in what Christian theology calls the trinitarian *koinonia* (the communion of the trinity). So, a dialogue that seeks mutual understanding will invite Christians to respect the Islamic obligation to the *Tawhid* which forbids divine sonship interpretations. It also offers Muslims the opportunity to understand what Christians mean when they talk about the divine sonship of Jesus. In the final analysis, when this form of dialogue leads to mutual respect and appreciation of the traditions of the other, then dialogue could be considered as successful on the basis of its interest i.e. the desire to learn from and about the other.

5.3.1.3. The Suffering, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ

The event of Jesus' suffering, death and Resurrection, also referred to as the Paschal mystery, is central to Christian faith and theology. Without the intention to engage in the debates concerning whether or not Jesus really died and rose from the dead, it must be said that first of all, all the four Gospels give detailed accounts of the veracity of the event

⁶¹⁴ Irfan Omar. *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue*. 2007, p118

⁶¹⁵ Ibid, p125

⁶¹⁶ Irfan Omar. *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue*. 2007, p118

⁶¹⁷ Ibid, p118

⁶¹⁸ Sachiko Murata & Williams C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. 1994, p171

(Mark 14:32 – 16:12, Matthew 26:47 – 28:16 and Luke 22:47 – 24:50). Secondly, the impact of the event in the lives of those who experienced it further underscores its factuality. This is demonstrated by its *revelatory* and *redemptive* effects in the lives of the early Christians.

For its *revelatory significance*, O’Collins indicates that the resurrection of Jesus “vindicated the certainty of the powerful future of the kingdom of God (Mark 14:25)”⁶¹⁹ i.e. Jesus’ preaching and miracles which manifested the presence of the kingdom of God suffered an apparent defeat by the death on the cross. However, the power of the kingdom was strikingly reasserted “through the resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit. This denouement fully justified the personal authority with which Jesus had spoken of the kingdom and which he had claimed over the Sabbath, the Temple, the law, forgiveness of sins, final judgement, and human salvation.”⁶²⁰ Furthermore, the resurrection also showed that, “far from being cursed by the God whom he called ‘Abba father’ (Galatians 3:13), Jesus had been divinely vindicated in himself, in his preaching, and in that utter fidelity to his vocation for which he sacrificed everything, even life itself.”⁶²¹ In consequence, the resurrection fully and finally *disclosed* “the meaning and truth of Christ’s life, person, work and death. It set a divine seal on Jesus and his ministry.”⁶²²

For its *redemptive significance*, O’Collins points out that Jesus’ preaching challenged the first Christians to rethink their understandings about the law, the Sabbath, forgiveness of sin and the Temple. Here, Jesus invited them “to accept the disconcerting reality that their relationship to him was determinative for their situation before God, both here and hereafter.”⁶²³ During this process, he predicted and defined his imminent death as the establishment of a “new covenant” (Luke 22:20) between God and humanity. Thus, he was crucified at the time of the “Passover feast.”⁶²⁴ These events made the early Christians go beyond their Jewish belief that the deliverance from Egypt, the covenant at Sinai and the entrance into the promised land were the only *divine acts* of redemption, to the

⁶¹⁹ Gerald O’Collins. *Christology*. 2009, p104

⁶²⁰ Ibid, p104

⁶²¹ Ibid, p104

⁶²² Ibid, p104

⁶²³ Gerald O’Collins. *Christology*. 2009, p110

⁶²⁴ Ibid, p110

understanding that the “events of Good Friday and Easter Sunday, together with the coming of the Holy Spirit, constituted God’s decisive and final act of salvation.”⁶²⁵

In consequence, they understood that the risen Christ is the last Adam, the powerful son of God and saviour of the world. This further explains why Jesus’ death on the cross is seen as the perfect sacrifice that restores humanity back to God (Rom 3:25).⁶²⁶ By His death and Resurrection, Jesus gained victory over sin, eternal death and Satan.⁶²⁷ As McGrath puts it, the victory of the cross provided the basis by which God is enabled to forgive sins.⁶²⁸ It is also a moral example for Christians in the way Jesus demonstrates a selfless love of God for humanity. In this way, the cross evokes a Christian response of love, guided by this act of selflessness.⁶²⁹ That is why Christian faith and theology views salvation as “manifested in and through and constituted on the basis of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ”.⁶³⁰

However, from an Islamic point of view, Jesus never died. The Islamic belief on the fate of Jesus reflects the Qur’anic *attestation* that: “...they did not kill him nor crucified him, though it was made to appear like that to them... No! God raised him to Himself” (Surah 4:157). The Qur’an further affirms that: “God said, Jesus, I will take you back and raise you up to me. I will purify you of the unbelievers” (Surah 3:55). Another Qur’anic text of remarkable importance here is where Jesus himself said; “Peace was on me the day I was born and peace will be on me the day I die and the day I am raised to life again” (Surah 19:33). Jesus also said – “I was a witness to them as long as I was with them. But ever since you took my soul, you were their overseer” (Surah 5:117).

From the above texts, it is evident that there are different claims as to whether or not Jesus actually died. Thus, the controversies surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus have prompted Islamic scholars to investigate what actually happened to Jesus

⁶²⁵ Ibid, p110-111

⁶²⁶ Alister McGrath. *Christian Theology*. 1997, p391-394

⁶²⁷ Ibid, p395-399

⁶²⁸ Ibid, p399-406

⁶²⁹ Ibid, p407-412

⁶³⁰ Ibid, p324

according to the Qur’anic narratives.⁶³¹ While some Christian apologists attempt to justify the claim that the Qur’an does not actually reject the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, Leirvik provides exegetical, theological and political reasons for the standard Muslim rejection of the crucifixion of Jesus and the cross.⁶³² Exegetically, Leirvik intimates that “what the Qur’an actually says about the crucifixion remains unresolved”.⁶³³ Even Muslim interpreters are said to hold different interpretations on the matter. Theologically, the question of the crucifixion seems to be “inseparable from what Muslims have perceived as non-acceptable implications of the cross as a religious symbol, like the idea of vicarious suffering and redemption”.⁶³⁴ And politically, the cross was the symbol of the rising Byzantine Empire in its formative period with the cross later becoming the symbol of the invading crusaders.⁶³⁵ Though the above views may represent reasons for the standard Muslim rejections of the crucifixion, how did classical Islamic commentators interpret some of the text listed above in respect to the death and resurrection of Jesus?

Let us consider the commentaries of some classical Islamic scholars like al-Tabari, al-Razi, al-Zamakhshari and al-Baydawi on the final end of Jesus. The views of these scholars revolve around the *substitution theory* or the *swoon theory*. As we intimated in chapter four, when al-Tabari undertakes a project on the interpretations of Qur’anic verses which are open to multiple interpretations, his frequent practice is “to list in order, each of the options which are presented in the traditions of which he is aware of. Then, having listed these legitimate options, he then states the text which is most likely or has the greater weight of evidence in its favour”.⁶³⁶ In his analysis of the meaning of *mutawaffi* (meaning “taken away”) in Surah 3:55, al-Tabari said that Islamic exegetes have differed on the meaning of *tawaffa* (death).⁶³⁷ While some scholars consider that *tawaffa* here means

⁶³¹ See Irfan Omar. *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue*. 2007, p156-179; Leirvik, Oddbjørn. *Images of Jesus in Islam*. 2010, p238-240; Beaumont. *Christology in Dialogue with Islam*. 2005, p9-10; Cragg. *Jesus and The Muslim*. 1999, p166-188

⁶³² Oddbjørn Leirvik. *Images of Jesus in Islam*. 2010, p239

⁶³³ Ibid, p239

⁶³⁴ Ibid, p239

⁶³⁵ Oddbjørn Leirvik. *Images of Jesus in Islam*. 2010, p139

⁶³⁶ Joseph Cumming. “Did Jesus die on the Cross? The History of Reflection on Jesus’ Death in Sunni Tafsir Literature”. 2001, p7

<http://www.learningace.com/doc/997971/e22490e3729bc1bdcca5495a3f68ca09/didjesusdieenglish>
(09/10/14)

⁶³⁷ See Neil Robinson. *Christ in Islam and Christianity*. 1991, p1198-120

“sleep” (i.e. I am causing you to sleep and raising you to myself in your sleep”), others think that *tawaffa* means “seizing” (i.e. “I am seizing you to myself and raising you to heaven”). Yet, others still think that *tawaffa* really means “real death” (i.e. “I am causing you to really die”).⁶³⁸

Al-Tabari indicated that since some commentators think that “death” here has no chronological order, *tawaffa* could mean “I am raising you to myself and cleansing you of the unbelievers and I will cause you to die after I send you back to earth at the end of time”.⁶³⁹ Having considered these four theories (*sleeping, seizing, real death* and the nonchronological arrangement), al-Tabari concluded that the theory that gains legitimate support in Islamic exegesis is the seizing theory: i.e. “I am seizing you from the earth alive to be close to me and taking you to be with me without death and raising you from the unbelievers”.⁶⁴⁰ With his interpretation of Surah 4:157, al-Tabari said that it was not Jesus who died on the cross, but God transformed someone to look like him (*shubbiha lahum*)⁶⁴¹ and it was this person who died on the cross.⁶⁴²

Al-Razi focused attention on Surah 4:157 where the Jews seem to claim that they killed the *Messiah*. In refutation the Qur’an says – “they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, though it was made to appear like that to them”. From this text, al-Razi supported the substitution theory, listing five different possibilities by which the substitution could have occurred. According to him, it is first of all possible that the Jews crucified someone like Jesus and lied about it. Secondly, it is possible that Judas sent Titanus to kill Jesus and Titanus was arrested and crucified instead. Thirdly, maybe a man who was guarding Jesus was transformed to look like him and it was him they killed. Fourthly, Jesus asked one of his disciples to volunteer and one of them did. Finally, al-Razi thinks that a hypocritical disciple who sought to betray Jesus was made to look like him

⁶³⁸ Joseph Cumming. “Did Jesus die on the Cross?” 2001, p7

⁶³⁹ See Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari cited in Joseph Cumming. “Did Jesus die on the Cross?” 2001, p8, and in Neil Robinson. *Christ in Islam and Christianity*. 1991, p122

⁶⁴⁰ Joseph Cumming. “Did Jesus die on the Cross?” 2001, p7-8

⁶⁴¹ See Neil Robinson. *Christ in Islam and Christianity*. 1991, p127-133

⁶⁴² Irfan Omar. *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue*. 2007, p160

and killed.⁶⁴³ Having considered these possibilities in the light of the exegetical considerations of “I am causing you to die” (*mutawaffika*) in Surah 3:55,⁶⁴⁴ al-Razi concluded that the text of Surah 4:157 implies that some kind of substitution must have taken place.⁶⁴⁵ So, Jesus did not die, but Allah took him to himself.

According to Joseph Cumming, the commentaries of al-Baydawi “are among the most popular and well trusted in the world today”.⁶⁴⁶ Like al-Tabari and al-Razi, al-Baydawi also listed various legitimate interpretations of a given verse, without indicating their origins or his particular preferences. In his commentary on Surah 3:55 he provides five interpretations to the clause “I am causing you to die” (*mutawaffika*). These are: bringing an end to your lifespan, seizing you from the earth, causing you to sleep, death to earthly desires and actual death.⁶⁴⁷ In his commentary on Surah 4:157, al-Baydawi provides two substitution theories: Jesus asked a volunteer to take his place when he knew that the Jews were coming to kill him in revenge for God turning a band of Jewish revilers into apes and pigs; or a Jew named Titanus was the victim.⁶⁴⁸

Though al-Baydawi seem to have problems with the substitution theology⁶⁴⁹ he nonetheless believes, like most Muslims do, that God could not possibly have allowed his prophet to die such a shameful death. Hence, God took him to himself, “projecting his likeness onto someone else.”⁶⁵⁰ Though many commentators tend to have different interpretations regarding whether or not Jesus died on the cross, standard Muslim belief has it that Jesus did not die on the cross. God took him to himself. For Leirvik, “in the Qur’an, everything is aimed at convincing the Believer that he will experience victory over the forces of evil”.⁶⁵¹ Islam therefore refuses to accept the tragic image of the passion,

⁶⁴³ See al-Razi in Joseph Cumming. “Did Jesus die on the Cross? The History of Reflection on Jesus’ Death in Sunni Tafsir Literature.” 2001, p17 and in Neil Robinson. *Christ in Islam and Christianity*. 1991, p135-138

⁶⁴⁴ Joseph Cumming. “Did Jesus die on the Cross?”, p11-12

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid, p14

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid, p21

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid, p21-22

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid, p22

⁶⁴⁹ He finds two problems with the substitution theory: the theological and the grammatical. On the theological plain, al-Baydawi finds it difficult to understand how one may predicate *deceit* as an attribute of God. From the grammatical point of view, he thinks that Islamic commentators have confused the subject of the passive verb *shubbiha* (Ibid, p23).

⁶⁵⁰ Neil Robinson. *Christ in Islam and Christianity*. 1991, p139

⁶⁵¹ Oddbjørn Leirvik. *Images of Jesus in Islam*. 2010, p4

because the passion implies in its eyes that God had failed. Thus, Edwin Calverley could say that for Muslims, “the prevention of the death of Jesus was another marked proof of Allah’s care for His prophets, His apostle, His word and His Spirit”.⁶⁵²

In this way, we could conclude that all three commentators converge on the claim that Jesus did not die, but God raised him to himself. If there was no death, it means that there was no resurrection either. It must be reiterated here again that while Jesus’ death and resurrection from a Christian point of view, was in view of saving fallen humanity from the depravity of original sin, Islam however has no concept of original sin because Allah forgave Adam and Eve after the fall. So, even if Jesus died and rose from the death, this act bears no soteriological significance for Islam. In this way, one can see that the idea of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ sets a separation between the Christian view and the Muslim perspective. As Mona Siddiqui points out, it is perhaps on this theology of redemption that Islam parts company with Christianity.⁶⁵³

However, what could be learnt from these two perspectives on the death and resurrection of Jesus? Although Christians believe that Jesus died and rose from the dead and Muslims hold that Jesus did not die at all, what could be learnt from these two positions about Jesus is that whether or not the crucifixion took place, Jesus ascended to heaven by virtue of God’s divine intervention. For Islam, this intervention raised Jesus to heaven without dying on the cross and for Christianity; this divine intervention raised him to life after the death.⁶⁵⁴ In other words, both religious communities agree that there was God’s divine power in the life of Jesus which prevented him from experiencing the shameful death. For Islam, Jesus did not die as a consequence of this and for Christianity; he died but rose from the dead as a consequence of this divine power. Thus, if God’s divine power enabled Jesus to accomplish the divine will in this remarkable way, how can Jesus’ life and teachings provide learning examples in their response to God and to human flourishing? While this question will be taken up in chapter six, let us delve into the Christological issues that serve as bridge to Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology.

⁶⁵² Edwin E. Calverley. “The Cross and Islam,” in *the Muslim World vol. XXVII No.2*. 1937, p108

⁶⁵³ See Mona Siddiqui. *Christians, Muslims & Jesus*. 2013, p218

⁶⁵⁴ OddjØrn Leirvik. *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*. 2010,p165

5.3.2. Jesus as *Bridge* to Dialogue

The concept *bridge* connotes the sense of a structure built for the purpose of providing passage over physical obstacles such as water, roads, valleys, rift and so on. Thus, it serves the purpose of linking two points that were initially separated by a perceived abyss or ditch. Within the context of Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology, bridge is used here as a heuristic device intended to define some of the narrative accounts about Jesus in the Qur'an and the Gospels which appear to bear some similarities. It is widely acknowledged that Christianity and Islam are the only two religions which have narratives about the life and mission Jesus Christ. Accounts such as the virginal conception, the miracles of Jesus, the Ascension and the Second Coming are few examples. It is these accounts which we consider as building bridges in Christian-Muslim conversations. Let us see how some of these christological themes also serve as fruitful contexts for Christian-Muslim conversations.

5.3.2.1. The Virginal Conception

The virginal conception and the *virginal birth of Jesus* are essentially part of the Christian story about the life of Jesus. Though many scholars seem to use one to refer to the other, they nonetheless have fine distinctions. While the *virginal conception* means that Mary conceived Jesus without the aid of a human Father (*virginitas in partu*); the virginal birth means that Mary remained virgin after the birth of Jesus (*virginitas post partum* or perpetual virginity). In other words, Jesus' birth did not cause a rupture of the hymen or bodily lesions.⁶⁵⁵ Whereas these two concepts define the *pre* and *post* parturient state of Mary's virginity within a particularly orthodox Christian understanding, they both mean one and the same thing i.e. the Christian belief that Mary gave birth to Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit without the loss of her virginity. For easy comprehension of the subject matter, we shall limit ourselves to the use of *virginal conception*; and by its use, it takes on both the *virginitas in partu* and the *virginitas post partum* implications of it. In other words, by use of the *virginal conception*, we mean that in addition to conceiving Jesus while a virgin, Mary remained a virgin after the birth of Jesus.

⁶⁵⁵ Joseph A. Fitzmyer. "The Virginal Conception of Jesus Christ in the New Testament." 1973, p541-542

This belief finds expression in the Scriptures – first foretold in the Old Testament by the prophet Isaiah (Isa 7:14-16) finding its fulfilment in the New Testament in the nativity narratives (Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-38). While Matthew and Luke present in detail the events leading to Jesus' birth, the Gospels of Mark and John together with the letters of St Paul are silent on the matter. Coupled with this silence are also some differences in the way Matthew and Luke present this account. For instance, while Matthew's account includes the betrothal, Luke's account does not make reference to it (Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-35). So, while the virginal conception is communicated to Joseph in Matthew's account (1:21-23), in Luke's account, it is communicated to Mary herself (1:31). As a consequence, some scholars tend to question the historical veracity of this event.⁶⁵⁶ However, what is common between Matthew and Luke's account is the common acceptance and affirmation that the "virginal conception" was the work of the Holy Spirit, exclusive of any form of marital conjugation.

It is the above understanding which received universal recognition and acceptance in the Christian church by the turn of the 2nd century and was incorporated into the Apostles' Creed. In the Roman Catholicism of the West and in the Eastern Orthodox Church and protestant circles, the "Virginal conception" was never strongly disputed, although some protestant thinkers see it as not relevant for Christian faith.⁶⁵⁷ This claim on the universal acceptability of the *virginal conception of Jesus* does not however sideline the fact that there were already psilanthropists⁶⁵⁸ whose views were a challenge to the virginal birth of Jesus in the 2nd Century even up to the present. For example, Celsus the Greek philosopher contested the virginal birth in the second century, as did Samuel Taylor

⁶⁵⁶ See Joseph A. Fitzmyer. "The Virginal Conception of Jesus Christ in the New Testament." 1973, p541 & Fatoohi, Louay. *The Mystery of the Historical Jesus*. 2007, p99-112. Fatoohi particularly provides scientific, historical, rational and Scriptural reasons for which the *virginal conception* is objected today.

⁶⁵⁷ See Fitzmyer, Joseph, A. "The Virginal Conception of Jesus Christ in the New Testament." 1973, p541 & Filson, F. S. *A New Testament History*. 1965, p86. According to Joseph Fitzmyer, "The notion of the virginal parturition has no basis in Scripture and come from post-NT and patristic writings. It even acquired status in Mariology."

⁶⁵⁸ "Psilanthropism" comes from the two Greek words; ψιλός (psilós), "plain," "mere" or "bare," and ἄνθρωπος (ánthrōpos) "human." Hence, "psilanthropism" is an approach to Christology which understands Jesus Christ as a mere human being, the literal son of human parents.

Coleridge in the 18th century.⁶⁵⁹ Even today people, like Richard Dawkins, reject this belief on the basis that it cannot be biologically proven.⁶⁶⁰

Irrespective of the position people take in respect of the virginal conception, the church continues to unequivocally define its stand on the matter.⁶⁶¹ According to Michael Schmaus, the Church believes that Mary conceived Jesus of the Holy Spirit without a human principle of generation. “It is the constant teaching of the church from the beginning, that she gave birth to Jesus without violation of her integrity and that she remained ever virgin”.⁶⁶² This is indeed part of the Church’s profession of faith.⁶⁶³ This faith is not just an abstract theological construction without its basis in Scripture; since the Gospels of Luke and Matthew do testify to it. However, where does Islam stand in respect to this acclaimed historical reality?

The Qur’an also has its narratives about the birth of Jesus and the virginal state of Mary after his birth. According to Fatoohi, the Qur’an makes explicitly clear that “Mary conceived Jesus without having a relation with a man. This is clear in the story of the annunciation, the story of the birth of Jesus and some other verses”.⁶⁶⁴ We find some of these affirmations in the two annunciation narratives in Surah 3:42-47 and Surah 19:16-22, where the Angel Gabriel is said to have told Mary about God’s intended plans for her. Thus the Qur’an says, “the Angel said to Mary: ‘Mary, God has chosen you and made you pure. He has truly chosen you above all women’” (Surah 3:42). In Surah 3:45, “The Angel said, ‘Mary, God gives you news of a Word from Him, whose name will be the *Messiah*, Jesus, son of Mary’. In Surah 19:19-22 the Angel said “‘I am but a Messenger from your Lord, to announce to you the gift of a pure son.’ She said, ‘how can I have a son when no man has touched me? I have not been unchaste,’ and he said, ‘This is what your Lord said; ‘it is easy for me’”.

⁶⁵⁹ See John McClintock. & James Strong. *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*. Vol. 2. 1894, p404

⁶⁶⁰ Richard Dawkins. *The God Delusion*. 2006, p93-94

⁶⁶¹ Vatican II on *Lumen Gentium*, no. 52-67

⁶⁶² Karl Rahner (ed.). *Encyclopedia of Theology*. 1999, p898

⁶⁶³ CCC #448-507

⁶⁶⁴ See Louay Fatoohi. *The Mystery of the Historical Jesus*. 2007, p117-119

The above texts demonstrate a Qur'anic narrative of the account of the annunciation. While Jackson Montell contends that the accounts of Surah 19:16-22 share similarities with the Lukan account of the annunciation and birth of Jesus,⁶⁶⁵ one finds that the two texts are not exactly the same. For instance, while the Qur'an reports that Mary first secluded herself from her family before her encounter with the Angel (Surah 19:16-17), the report in Luke's Gospel (Lk 1:26-27) is silent on the exact location where the encounter occurred except for the mention of Nazareth. The text is silent on the question of where exactly in Nazareth. Secondly, Surah 19:16-22 does not have the opening greetings of the Angel as expressed in the Gospel of Luke – "Hail full of grace, the Lord is with you" (Lk 1:28). Apart from these differences, which some scholars may consider insignificant, the rest of the message of the annunciation narrative in Surah 19:16-22 seem to find resonance in Luke 1:26-31. This is by no means implying that they are the same. For Parrinder, though similar to the canonical Gospels, the Qur'anic narratives on the annunciation are more linked to the apocryphal sources.⁶⁶⁶

The tendency to overlook these differences when comparing the two narratives is held in check by Leirvik Oddbjørn cautions that one must always be sensitive to the functions of these texts in their respective contexts.⁶⁶⁷ This is because as Leirvik puts it, "superficial similarities between two signs may conceal profound differences in the meaning that a certain conception is attributed within the different systems of meaning".⁶⁶⁸ Thus, it could only be proper to say that though different, Christians and Muslims could identify themselves with the Biblical and Qur'anic narratives about the "virginal conception" in that not only is the Angel Gabriel the announcer of God's intended purpose for Mary, but God himself was going to aid Mary accomplish this purpose without the need for a human Father. Here, both accounts confirm that Jesus' birth was an express act of God – "Be! And He was" (Surah 3:47). In Surah 21:91 and Surah 66:12, the Qur'an reports that God "breathed His Spirit" into Mary while she was still chaste. In the

⁶⁶⁵ Montell presents a Christian Apologetical view in the bid to discredit Islam and Muhammad. It is understood that his work is not dialogue friendly. However, he acknowledges this point of closeness in the story of Jesus' birth in the Bible and the Qur'an. (See Jackson R. Montell. *Islam Revealed*. 2003, p71-79, 73)

⁶⁶⁶ Parrinder. *Jesus in the Qur'an*. 1965, p76

⁶⁶⁷ Oddbjørn Leirvik. *The Image of Jesus in the Qur'an*. 2010, p15

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid, p15

Matthew's Gospel, the Angel said to Joseph, "what is conceived in her (Mary) is by the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:20).

Interpretations to the above texts from Islamic commentators further support the argument that the Qur'an affirms the "Virginal conception of Jesus". For instance, al-Razi intimates that there was no question of a human Father involved in Jesus' conception for either God breathed His Spirit into Mary or the Angel Gabriel did.⁶⁶⁹ For Yusuf Ali, "Mary the mother of Jesus was unique in that she gave birth to a son by a special miracle without the intervention of the customary physical means".⁶⁷⁰ In consequence, it could be said that whereas the Qur'an contains accounts of the virginal conception and virginal birth of Jesus, it is wrong to quickly read divine implications into them. This is because in Islam, there is only one God and Jesus is his prophet. Hence the Qur'an emphasizes that "in God's eyes, Jesus is just like Adam: He created him from the dust and said to him, 'Be,' and he was" (Surah 3:59). Consequently, what could be said about the Qur'anic and Biblical accounts about the "virginal conception" is that, the two accounts point to the extraordinary nature of Jesus' birth and how this contributes to authenticating his later role as the "prophet of Allah" and the "Son of God" respectively. Having faithfully fulfilled these roles in the Qur'an and the Gospels, what might Christians and Muslims learn from each other about Jesus the prophet of Allah and Jesus Christ the Son of God?

5.3.2.2. Jesus' Miraculous Powers

Dermot Lane in *The Reality of Jesus*⁶⁷¹ asserted that within the self-consciousness or experience of the disciples, Jesus' divinity was fully construed after the resurrection. But before they came to this point, they understood Jesus Christ initially as a prophet, a Rabbi and the *Messiah*. The accounts of Mk 8:27-29 and Lk 9:18-20 demonstrate the varied perceptions these disciples of Jesus had about him and the mission he fulfilled in their midst. That is, the conviction with which Jesus preached his message and the signs and wonders that accompanied his preaching, initially, provoked the thinking of the disciples

⁶⁶⁹ Al-Razi quoted in Beaumont, Mark. *Christology in Dialogue with Islam*. 2005, p2

⁶⁷⁰ Yusuf Ali. *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*. 1934, or See Beaumont, Mark. *Christology in Dialogue with Islam*. 2005, p2

⁶⁷¹ Dermot Lane. *The Reality of Jesus*. 1975, p66-80

that Jesus was not just an ordinary Jewish man, like the rest, but that God was with him affirming his message through the signs and wonders performed.

As we indicated in chapter four on “Markan Christology”, Mark presented the wondrous signs performed by Jesus as affirmations of his status as the “Son of God. What Jesus said and did was all due to who he was – the “Son of God”. Thus, the reader in Mark’s Gospel soon discovers in the narratives concerning Jesus Christ as the “Son of God” (Mk 1:16 – 8:26) that after Jesus’ announcement of the imminence of the kingdom of God and the calling of some disciples, what immediately follows in succession are exorcisms, healings, deliverances and the show of supernatural authority. As Donald English intimated, these signs and wonders made Mark’s picture of the *Messiah* more compelling because Jesus did not only preach to the people but he accompanied his preaching with miracles of healing, deliverance and raising people from the dead. Furthermore, Géza Vermes indicated that Luke shows that Jesus himself defined the nature of his ministry through these healings and exorcisms.⁶⁷² For Christian faith and theology, therefore, Jesus Christ accomplished this task because of who he was: “the Christ, the son of the living God” (Mk 8:29).

In a particularly Islamic context, God is the source of Jesus’ power. This is copiously acknowledged in the Qur’an when the Angel told Mary, “God will teach Jesus, the *Messiah* “the Wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel, He will send him as a Messenger to the people of Israel. I have come to you with a sign from your Lord... I will heal the blind, the leper and bring the dead back to life with God’s permission” (Surah 3:48-49). The Qur’an also says: “Then God will say, Jesus, son of Mary! Remember my favour to you and to your mother: how I strengthened you with the Holy Spirit... How by my leave, you fashioned the shape of a bird out of clay, breathed into it and it became a bird; how by my leave, you healed the blind and the leper; how by my leave, you brought the dead back to life” (Surah 5:110). From the preceding texts, the Qur’an explicitly affirms that Jesus succeeded in doing what he did because God’s favour was with him – for by God’s leave, he healed the blind, the lepers and raised the dead to live (Surah 5:110).

⁶⁷² Geza Vermes. *Jesus the Jew*. 1973, p58

As may be recalled, we argued in chapter four in the section relating to “The Relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit”⁶⁷³ that from a Qur’anic context, the intimate relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit accounts for Jesus’ ability to function as an outstanding prophet and messenger of Allah. We saw that al-Tabari, al-Zamakhshari and al-Razi all concede that Jesus’ miracles were signs which served to authenticate his status as the prophet of Allah.⁶⁷⁴ So, by correlating the two theological positions on the miracles of Jesus one realises that whereas Christianity asserts that Jesus performed his miracles as a consequence of who he was (the son of God), for Islam, Jesus performed these miracles through God’s power invested in him.

In a dialogical context, however, both religions, first of all, acknowledge that Jesus indeed performed these miracles. Secondly, from an Islamic context, if the Holy Spirit is known to have been with Jesus from the beginning to his final end, then the Holy Spirit supported Jesus because it fulfilled the divine command of Allah. Understood as the Angel Gabriel, it is the Holy Spirit who teaches, guides, strengthens and assists Jesus in doing what he was sent to do as a messenger of Allah. This means that God was instrumental in helping Jesus accomplish his mission through the aid of the Angel Gabriel. It is therefore significant to note here that through the Miracles Jesus performed, Allah alleviated the suffering, the alienation through death and the pain of his people. The question then is: how can Jesus’ life and mission inspire Christians and Muslims to collectively undertake acts that would promote human flourishing?

It is true that the Islamic obligation to the *Tawhid* does not support the reading of divine implications into the miracles of Jesus. To contest the reading of divine implications into the miracles of Jesus, Abu Isa al-Warraq argued in the 9th Century that, if Christians claim that the Miracles of Jesus are suggestive of his divinity, then Moses must have been divine because he also performed miracles (Surah 2:60; 7:107; 7:117).⁶⁷⁵ For Islam, the *Tawhid* always remains its faith defining principle. The belief that God is one, unique and transcendent is the fundamental theological premise of Islamic faith. Though for Christian

⁶⁷³ See Chapter four on “The Relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit,” interpreted against the background of the three Qur’anic text (Surah 2:87, Surah 2: 253, and 5: 110)

⁶⁷⁴ See Chapter four on the views of al-Tabari, al-Razi and al-Zamakhshari

⁶⁷⁵ Abu Isa Warraq. “Against the Trinity” in D. Thomas. *Anti-Christian Polemics in Early Islam*. 1992, p92 & Mark Beaumont. *Christology in Dialogue with Islam*. 2005, p5

faith and theology the divinity of Jesus constitutes the basis for his miracles, Christians and Muslims can at least focus on Jesus' concern for the poor and the marginalized and use that as a common context for collective actions in response to their needs and concerns. We shall see how this aspect of interfaith action could be possible in chapter six.

5.3.2.3. The Ascension and Second Coming of Jesus Christ

The Ascension is the Christian belief that after the resurrection Jesus Christ was taken up into heaven in His glorious resurrected body. This event is said to have occurred 40 days after the Resurrection (Acts 1:3). According to Kasper, Luke inserts a period of 40 days between the Resurrection and the Ascension. Hence, the Ascension occurred within the context of a post-Resurrection appearance. As Kasper understands it, Luke's *Forty* is a sacred number (the Israelites journey in the wilderness; Jesus sojourn in the wilderness). It designates a holy period of a considerable length of time; the time during which Jesus appeared to the disciples after the Resurrection.⁶⁷⁶

While Luke 24:50-53 and Mk 16:19 present a succinct description of the event, the Acts of the Apostles (especially Acts 1:9-11), presents a more picturesque account of Jesus' Ascension to heaven.⁶⁷⁷ For Mark the Ascension occurred after a meal (16:19). In Luke, it occurred in Bethany not far from Jerusalem (24:50), while Acts gives a precise location – “on the Mount of Olives” (Acts 1:12). Though these Evangelists seem to present different accounts about Jesus' Ascension, what remains significantly common to them is the fact that indeed the Ascension did occur.

For Christian faith and theology, the significance of this event of the Ascension lies in the fact that whereas the Resurrection presupposes the crucifixion, it also serves as the foundation from which the Ascension finds its authenticity – for if Jesus did not die, he could not have risen from the dead and if he did not rise from the dead, he could not have ascended to heaven. In retrospect, if the Ascension did occur, then one could say that Jesus must have resurrected from the dead before he could ascend to heaven. If all these took place (the crucifixion, death, Resurrection and Ascension), then they contribute in

⁶⁷⁶ Walter Kasper. *Jesus the Christ*. 1976, p148

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid, p148

affirming the Christian belief that Jesus is the “son of God” and thus, had an eternal existence. It is therefore the Church’s belief that having ascended to heaven, Jesus “will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead”.⁶⁷⁸ This notion of the Return brings to the fore the Church’s doctrine of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (the Parousia).

Known in Christian theology as the *Parousia*, the second coming of Jesus Christ is an eschatological event recounted in both Christianity and Islam. Within the context of the New Testament the word *Parousia* is used 18 times in the sense of “the second coming of Christ” or “the day of the Lord”.⁶⁷⁹ Apart from the name *Parousia*, the “Second coming of Jesus” is also referred to as the epiphany (2Thes 2:8) or the apocalypse (1Pet 4:13). As Alister McGrath pointed out, the event of the *Second Coming* of Jesus is “closely connected to the execution of final judgement”.⁶⁸⁰ This is fully expressed in the Nicene Creed which says: “He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end”. From the Gospel accounts, Jesus did not only predict this event but he also presented a graphic picture of the nature of this event and how it will occur (see Matthew 24:29-41; Mark 13:28ff; Luke 17:20ff).

As we indicated earlier, the Qur’an denies the crucifixion and death of Jesus (Surah 4:157-159). For orthodox Islamic commentators like al-Tabari and al-Razi, while the Jews plotted to kill Jesus, God raised him to Himself in heaven; making one to appear like Jesus and it was this person who was crucified.⁶⁸¹ Many Islamic scholars and commentators concur that the phrase “raising Jesus unto himself” means that God took Jesus bodily into heaven. So, Jesus’ Ascension to heaven is widely attested to, in both the Qur’an and in *Tafsir* literature.⁶⁸² As Mark Beaumont intimated, the consequence of the denial of the death of Jesus on the cross has been the assumption of many scholars that “Jesus was raised up without going through the process of death. This is seen in al-Tabari’s

⁶⁷⁸ This statement - “He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,” is part of the Church’s profession of faith, articulated in the Nicene Creed.

⁶⁷⁹ The word *Parousia* can be found in the following verses: Matthew 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Corinthians 15:23.

⁶⁸⁰ McGrath, Alister, E. *Christian Theology*. 1992, p543

⁶⁸¹ See the Islamic exegetical support for the *Substitution Theory* expressed in the views of al-Tabari, al-Razi and al-Baydawi in Cumming, Joseph. “Did Jesus die on the Cross? The History of Reflection on Jesus’ Death in Sunni Tafsir Literature.” 2001, p7-22

⁶⁸² This assertion is presupposed in al-Tabari, al-Razi and al-Baidawi’s arguments that, Jesus was not crucified, but God raised him to himself in heaven, and only allowed one who looked like him to be crucified (Mark Beaumont. *Christology in Dialogue with Islam*. 2005, p9)

interpretation that God raised Jesus to himself before the one like him was seized and crucified”.⁶⁸³

Hence, in the denial of the crucifixion and death of Jesus on the cross, is the affirmation of the fact of the Ascension narrative. Here, both the Qur'an and post-Qur'anic literature acknowledge the Ascension and Second Coming of Jesus (Surah 4:158 and 43:61). Whereas the above Qur'anic texts suggest the “Second Coming of Jesus” at the Last Hour, the hadiths also give a clearer account on the matter with some hadiths even indicating where and how the “Second Coming of Jesus” will occur. For instance, according to the hadith *Sahih al-Bukhari*, “the Hour will not be established until Jesus descends as a ruler”.⁶⁸⁴ The Hour here refers to “the Day of Resurrection and Judgement” when Allah will assess everyone according to their deeds. Hence, the “Hour” defines the “Day of Reckoning, the Last Day or the End Time” (Surah 71:18).

But this important event can only occur after Jesus' Second Coming; eliciting the significance of Jesus' second Coming in Islamic eschatology. According to the hadith *Sahih al-Bukhari*, the Second Coming of Jesus will be in the midst of wars that are fought by the *Mahdi* (the righteous) against the Anti-Christ (*Dajjal* or false *Messiah*) and all his followers. During these wars, Jesus is expected to descend on the East of Damascus and be anointed while wearing yellow robes. He will then join the *Mahdi* in the fight against the Anti-Christ. He will follow the Islamic teachings as a Muslim. His conquests over the Anti-Christ and his followers will be a sign to the “People of the Book” who will then believe in him, leading to the formation of one community, the community of Islam.⁶⁸⁵ Jesus will assume leadership of this community bringing about universal peace.⁶⁸⁶ In this Second Coming, Jesus will pray as a Muslim and God, in response to His prayers will kill Gog and Magog (the gods responsible for disharmony in the Universe).⁶⁸⁷ Having ruled this community for 40 years, Jesus will die and will be buried as a Muslim in Mecca in an

⁶⁸³ Ibid, p10

⁶⁸⁴ Sahih al-Bukhari. Vol. 3, 656. Its full title is; “Kitab-ul-`Ilm (Book of Knowledge) <http://sunnah.com/search/?q=jesus+and+the+hour> (16/03/2015)

⁶⁸⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 41: 7043. Its full title is: “Al-Musnadu Al-Sahihu bi Naklil Adli” <http://www.usc.edu/org/cmje/religious-texts/hadith/muslim/041-smt.php#041.7023> (27-05-2013). This Hadith is said to be the second most authentic hadiths in Sunni circles.

⁶⁸⁶ Harun Yahya. *Portents And Features Of The Mahdi's Coming*. Global Publishing (Kindle Edition). 2010.

⁶⁸⁷ Tamar Sonn. *A Brief History in Islam* 2004, p209

empty tomb prepared for him beside Muhammad and his immediate companions (Abu Bakr and Umar).⁶⁸⁸

As we intimated earlier, Jesus' Second Coming which is directly connected to *The Hour* is a significant eschatological concept for Muslims and Christians. In Islam, The Hour is directly linked to "Yawm al-Qiyāmah" (the Day of Resurrection) or "Yawm ad-Dīn" (the Day of Judgement). These eschatological events constitute the "End Time" for all life, followed by the resurrection and Allah's assessment of the conduct of every human being (Judgement).⁶⁸⁹ But the Hadith (*Sahih al-Bukhari*) says that *The Hour* will not be established without Jesus' *Second Coming*, thus demonstrating the significance of the event. As an eschatological event, Christians and Muslims believe that associated to the "Second Coming of Jesus" is the "Last Hour", the "Day of Judgement". The judgement of the individual believer would centre on how one submitted oneself to the will of God.

While Muslims believe that God will be the final judge in this event and Jesus will only be a witness, Christians on the other hand, believe that Jesus as God will judge both the living and the dead. Consequently, from a correlational perspective, we could say that at the Second Coming Jesus would either be the judge for Christians or would be a witness in judgement for Muslims. In either way, Jesus would play a significant role in determining the fate of every believer (either as judge or witness in judgement). Hence, for both Islam and Christianity, it is those who remain faithful and committed to God to the end who would find God's mercies. So, if Jesus Christ will be a witness in judgement (for Islam) or judge (for Christianity) on the Last Day (the day of judgement), how can his message contribute in providing guidance to Muslims and Christians in their response to God and to issues of social justice such that by their adherence to it, they may find God's mercies on the Day of Judgement?

5.4. Conclusion

Having journeyed through the above comparative theological work of correlation between Qur'anic Christology and the Christology of the NT, one could to some extent say that

⁶⁸⁸ See "Isa" in Glassé, Cyril. *The New Encyclopedia of Islam*. 2002, p239-240

⁶⁸⁹ See Surah 6: 57, 10: 45, 28: 88 and 33:63

Jesus is both *bridge* and *barrier* to Christian-Muslim dialogue. This is because the Qur'an both affirms and denies aspect of his life in the accounts of the Gospels. As Mark Beaumont conceptualizes, the Virginal Conception may be accepted as true but the Christian interpretation of the incarnation as a consequence of it is denied. The Miracles of Jesus are affirmed but the Christian understanding of these miracles as a consequence of his divinity is denied.⁶⁹⁰ Furthermore, while Jesus' Ascension to heaven and His Second Coming is affirmed in both the Qur'an and in some of the Hadiths, the Christian interpretations of these events as intrinsically linked to the mystery of his death and Resurrection is denied. The references to Jesus as "the Word of God", "*Messiah*" and "the Spirit of God" maybe affirmed in the Qur'an but the Christian interpretations of these titles as suggestive of Jesus' divinity are categorically denied. As it were, the basis for these denials is to be found in the *Tawhid* which remains a nonnegotiable faith principle in Islam – "There is no god but one God" (Surah 5:73).

Though the doctrines of the Holy Trinity, the divine sonship of Jesus and his death and resurrection are seen as barriers to Christian-Muslim dialogue, they nonetheless serve as contexts for learning when genuine respect for the Christologies of the other becomes the consequence of the interlocutors' comprehension of the tradition-specificity of their respective christologies and the theological foundations which support these christologies. Apart from these *barriers*, Islam and Christianity also have christological themes which seem to serve as *bridges* in their dialogical relations. These themes include the virginal conception, the miracles of Jesus, the Ascension and the second coming. Even though there are differences to the meanings and interpretations of these themes in each tradition, they nevertheless point to the common grounds these narratives provide for Christian-Muslim conversations on issues of social justice.

Consequently, in a project of dialogue as an exercise in learning from and about the other, how can the Jesus of the Qur'an and the Jesus of the NT contribute to Christian-Muslim dialogue of life and the dialogue of common action? In other words, if submission to the will of God is also expressed in the "love of God and love of neighbour", how does the life and mission of Jesus Christ become learning examples for Christian-Muslim

⁶⁹⁰ Beaumont, Mark. *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims*. 2005, p10

collective response to “the love of God and love of neighbour” through the dialogues of life and dialogue of common action? We reckon that a critical response to the above questions could contribute to further reflections on how Christians and Muslims can embark on projects such as Christian-Muslim prayers for peace and peaceful co-existence, Christian-Muslim collective responses to the value of marriage and family life and to the needs of the poor and the marginalized in society. We consider these as significant issues (values) which touch the core of both religions.

In the chapter that follows, we hope to analyse some of these “values” in the light of how they are construed in the philosophical and theological traditions of both faiths, how the message, the life and mission of Jesus Christ in the Qur’an and the Gospels contribute in fleshing out their significance within their tradition-specific contexts and how they could serve as common contexts for Christian-Muslims collective actions through the dialogue of life and the dialogue of common action. Let us now turn to this aspect of the study.

CHAPTER SIX

6. CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DIALOGUE ON CHRISTOLOGY FOR THE PROMOTION OF COMMON VALUES

6.1. Introduction

From the discourses in chapters four and five, one may begin to appreciate the fact that though Jesus Christ is the “Son of God” in Christianity and the “prophet of Allah” in Islam, it is not just enough to merely allude to these designations without careful reflections on their deeper meaning in respect of the theological frameworks which support these meanings in each tradition. From the context of the Qur’an, Jesus is presented as the “*Messiah*” (Surah 5:72), “Word of/from God” (Surah 3:45), a “Spirit of/from God” (Surah 4:171) and the “closest friend of God who will be held in honour in this world and the next” (Surah 3:45). Though some of these designations appear to be similar to the Christian presentations of him, their meanings do not approximate to the divine interpretations associated to them within Christian faith and theology.

As we indicated earlier, to fully understand the theological grounds which support the Islamic tradition-specific understanding of Jesus Christ, one needs to turn to the *Tawhid* (Surah 5:73). Islamic faith and theology is built on the knowledge of the unicity and transcendence of Allah. The life of every good Muslim is guided by the belief in God’s uniqueness and transcendence. Consequently, to turn the *Tawhid* on its head would amount to destroying the very foundation on which Islam as a religion is built. For this reason, no matter the honorific titles that are ascribed to Jesus in the Qur’an, he only functions as a prophet of Allah. From the perspective of Christian faith and theology, the designation of Jesus Christ as the “Son of God” is part of the Christian experience of God and finds its theological articulation in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

The Holy Trinity defines the Christian experience of God’s revelation as “three persons in One God”. God the Father created the world, God the Son (Jesus Christ) redeemed the world and God the Holy Spirit sanctifies the world. Here, the Father is revealed by the Son and the Father and the Son together revealed the Holy Spirit. As the second person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ is the reason for Christianity. In other

words, as McGrath puts it, “it is impossible to speak of ‘God’ within the parameters of the Christian tradition without relating such statements to the person and work of Jesus Christ”.⁶⁹¹ In this way, between Islam and Christianity lie the *Tawhid* and the Holy Trinity which define and shape their respective understanding of the identity and mission of Jesus Christ. Different as they are, they define the parameters within which their respective Christologies are construed.

However, in narrating the stories regarding their respective perspectives on the identity and mission of Jesus Christ, one also finds some degree of similarities in these narratives. In chapter five, we saw examples of such christological themes such as: “the virginal conception” (Luke 1:26-35 versus Surah 19:16-22), “the miracles of Jesus” (Mark 1:21 – 8:22 versus Surah 3:48-49 and 5:110), “the Ascension and Second coming of Jesus” (Mark 16:19 versus Surah 4:158).⁶⁹² However, though these themes appear to be similar, one must not lose sight of the fact that their meanings and interpretations are done against the background of the *Tawhid* and the Holy Trinity. Here, while the Qur’an affirms, adds to and denies aspects of the life of Christ in the Gospels, the NT image of Jesus Christ is starkly different from the Qur’anic presentations of him. As Mark Beaumont puts it, in the Qur’an “the virginal conception is accepted as true, but the Christian understanding of the incarnation is ruled out. The miraculous work of Jesus is affirmed but not a Christian veneration of Jesus’ miraculous powers as proof of his divinity”.⁶⁹³

The crucial question of dialogue in the midst of these Christological affirmations and denials is: how can these affirmations and denials become fruitful contexts for Christian-Muslim dialogues of life and of common action? In other words, Jesus as a “prophet of Allah” in Islam and as the “Son of God” in Christianity proclaimed a unique message about God in the Qur’an and in the NT Gospels. What is the centrality of the message? How can this message of the prophet and the son of God lead Christians and Muslims in a collective response to the call to submit to the will of God and to foster human flourishing? In order to reach a greater appreciation of the message of Jesus the “prophet of Allah” and Jesus Christ the “Son of God”, we shall undertake a succinct

⁶⁹¹ Alister McGrath. *Christian Theology*. 1997, p324

⁶⁹² See Chapter five on “Jesus as Bridge to Christian-Muslim Dialogue.”

⁶⁹³ Mark Beaumont. *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims*. 2005, p10

investigation into the significant places he occupies in both traditions. The purpose is to lay the foundation for teasing out the possibility of common values as a result of this varying significance.

6.2.The Significance of Jesus to Christian Faith and Theology

As we indicated earlier on, Jesus Christ is the reason for Christian faith and theology. Without him there is no Christianity. In other words, for Christian faith and theology, Jesus Christ does not just reveal something of importance to Christians, but he achieves it – something without which salvation would be impossible and Christianity would never have come into existence. Hence, it is difficult for one to talk about the significance of Jesus Christ for Christianity in a rather limited space in this section. However, for the purpose of stating the Christian claim on Jesus Christ as the “Son of God and saviour of the world”, we would attempt a brief presentation of his significance by focusing on some significant milestones in his life. These include: the nativity, the baptism, the transfiguration, the crucifixion, death and resurrection, the Ascension and the second coming. Even with these, one is in danger of undermining the significance of other important events in the life of Jesus Christ.

However, it could be said that a comprehensive elucidation of the above “significant milestones” eventually leads to other aspects of Jesus’ life and mission. For instance, while the nativity points to the doctrine of the Incarnation, the events of the baptism and the transfiguration – especially “the voice from heaven” (Mark 1:11 and 9:7) – further attest to Jesus’ eternal Sonship with the Father. More so, while the crucifixion, death and resurrection are viewed as redemptive,⁶⁹⁴ the Ascension and the Second Coming reinforce the belief that Jesus Christ is the eternal son of God who returns to his place of glory, after having accomplished his mission (the salvation of the world). From there, he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Consequently, the other events which occur within and in-between these “significant milestones” contribute to giving a complete Christian picture of the identity

⁶⁹⁴ “If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (1Cor 15:17).

and mission of Jesus Christ on the one hand, and his significance to Christian faith and theology on the other.⁶⁹⁵ What can then be said about the place of Jesus Christ in Christian faith and theology? First of all, it must be repeated that Jesus Christ is the reason for the existence of Christianity as a religion. He is the historical point of departure and culmination for Christian faith and theology. As McGrath puts it, Christianity represents a “sustained response to the questions raised by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ”.⁶⁹⁶ Following the views of Alister McGrath, it could be said that the central place of Jesus Christ in Christian faith and theology consist in the understanding that: (1) Jesus Christ is the fullest revelation of God for Christianity. (2) He is the bearer of salvation for Christians (3) and he defines the shape of the redeemed life.

First of all, to say that “Jesus reveals God” means that Jesus makes God known in a particular and specific manner distinctive to Christianity, and to say that “Jesus Christ makes God known” is to imply that he is God and to see him is to have seen God (John 14:7, 9). Hence, McGrath asserted that “the confession that ‘Jesus is Lord,’ is not only that Jesus is divine, but that God is Christ-like”.⁶⁹⁷ This, however, does not imply that all other conceptions of God outside Christ are wrong. It is to affirm that within Christian faith and theology, “it is impossible to speak of ‘God’ within the parameters of the Christian tradition without relating such statements to the person and mission of Jesus Christ”.⁶⁹⁸

Secondly, to say that “Jesus Christ is the bearer of salvation” is to affirm that Jesus Christ makes salvation possible. He is the source of salvation for the Christian. It means salvation is “manifested in and through and constituted on the basis of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ”.⁶⁹⁹ It conveys the sense of what Jesus said to Martha in John’s Gospel: “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though he die; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25-26). Hence, to say that “‘Jesus makes salvation possible’ is not to deny that other modes of salvation are accessible by other means; it is simply to insist that within the Christian tradition, the Christian understanding of what salvation is can only be realised on the basis of Jesus

⁶⁹⁵ Alister E. McGrath. *Christian Theology*. 1997, p388

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid, p322

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid, p323

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid, p324

⁶⁹⁹ McGrath. *Christian Theology*. 1997, p324

Christ”.⁷⁰⁰ It is as Saint Paul declared, “if Christ had not risen from the dead, our faith would have been in vain and we would have remained in our sins” (1Cor 15:17).

Thirdly, to say that Jesus defines the shape of the redeemed life means that not only does Jesus Christ make the redeemed life possible, but he also determines it. The “redeemed life” relates to the salvation brought about by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (atonement for sin), the new life made available to the believer (2Cor 5:17) and the believer’s commitment to living out the message of Jesus Christ which gives guidance to this life. In other words, having become Christian, the believer now sees Christ and his message as defining the kind of relationship he/she is called to develop with God and neighbour. This new relationship is defined by one’s love for God and love for neighbour (Mark 12:30-31). In this way, living the redeemed life then entails conformity to the message of Jesus Christ. Here, one tries to shape one’s life according to the message and exemplary life of Jesus Christ.

As we pointed out earlier, Jesus is the reason for Christian faith and theology. As the “Son of God”, he fully, definitively and constitutively discloses God within the context Christian faith and theology. Through his death and resurrection he has opened the way to salvation for all who seek him and determines how the redeemed life should be lived through the message of the Gospels. Having said this, what then could be said about the significance of Jesus in the Qur’an and Islam as a whole? While Jesus is considered second in significance to the prophet Muhammad in Islam, what could be the significant role of Jesus as a prophet of Allah in Islam? As we indicated earlier, by focusing on the significance of Jesus Christ in Islam and Christianity, the purpose is to see how this could offer common grounds for teasing out common values between Christianity and Islam. These values will then be proposed for Christian-Muslim dialogues of life and of common action.

6.3. The Significance of Jesus in the Qur’an and in Islam

Despite the doctrinal and theological differences that exist between the Christian and Islamic understanding of Jesus Christ, many Muslims and Muslim scholars, do

⁷⁰⁰Ibid, p324

acknowledge that Jesus is a unique prophet of Allah, “His closest friend (Surah 3:45), a Spirit from Him and His Word sent to Mary (Surah 4:171)”. Jesus is seen as a great teacher, a great leader and one of the greatest influences for good the world has ever known among the line of prophets. According to the Qur'an, Jesus is “the greatest above all in this world and in the world to come” (Surah 3:45).

With all these honorific titles and accolades ascribed to Jesus in the Qur'an, what could be the significant place of Jesus as a prophet of Allah in Islam? As a prophet, is his message strictly meant for only the People of the Book? Or its emphasis on the obligation to the *Tawhid* makes it relevant for Muslims whose fundamental faith principle lies in the acknowledgement and confession of the *Tawhid*? Let us delve into this area by use of some of the titles designated to Jesus in the Qur'an as our point of entry into the significant place Jesus occupies in Islam as a prophet of Allah.

6.3.1. The Significance of Jesus as the “Messenger of Allah”

...the *Messiah*, Jesus, son of Mary, was nothing more than a messenger of God...and a Spirit from Him. So believe in God and in His messengers” (Surah 4:171).

We intimated earlier that the word “islam” means submission to the will of God revealed through His prophets and messengers. The Qur'an names some of these prophets and messengers as: Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (Surah 3:84). Concerning the place of Jesus as messenger, Allah says in the Qur'an that “We sent Jesus, son of Mary in their footsteps to confirm the Torah that had been sent before him: we gave him the Gospels with guidance and light for those who take heed of God” (Surah 5:46). Hence, if to be truly “muslim”, is to be a committed follower of the message of revelation given to the prophets and messengers, among whom is Jesus; then the message of Jesus in the Qur'an could provide “guidance” to all those who desire to submit themselves to the will of God.

The Islamic understanding that Adam is the first messenger of Allah and Muhammad the final messenger is very significant for the religion – for in Adam, God established the *Trust* (amana) for all humanity and in Muhammad, God brings to

conclusion the communication of His message to humanity through prophetic guidance. As Mona Siddiqui indicated, Muhammad is viewed by Muslims as the final prophet in prophetic chronology, but his message is essentially the same as that of his predecessors. “Once distilled to its fundamentals, the message is of the oneness, mercy and sovereignty of God”.⁷⁰¹ Thus, if the message of Jesus in the Qur’an contributes to giving guidance on the obligation to the *Tawhid* (Surah 3:51) then, though secondary to the prophet Muhammad, the Qur’anic Jesus could contribute to directing Muslims to the straight path which leads to Allah (Surah 19:30).

Though the Qur’an indicates that the details of the message of the prophets differ, it nevertheless mentions in several verses that the message of succeeding prophets confirm those of the past: “step by step, He has sent the Scriptures down to you with the Truth, confirming what went before: He sent down the Torah and the Gospel earlier as a guide for the people and He has sent down the distinction between right and wrong” (Surah 3:3-4). As Mona Siddiqui indicated; “despite the unique place of Muhammad in Muslim piety and veneration, Muhammad’s prophecy in the Qur’an lies in the wider context and mission of previous prophets”.⁷⁰² Hence, as a messenger of Allah, Jesus first of all stands as that pivotal point that links Muhammad to the rest of the prophets and messengers of Allah before him. He is that significant part of the chain of prophecy, from which the Prophethood of Muhammad finds its authentic link; for after Jesus would come the prophet Muhammad.

In consequence, the Qur’an does not only see Jesus as preceding the prophet Muhammad, but it also conceives him as the precursor and guarantor of the coming of Muhammad – thus Jesus, son of Mary said, ““children of Israel, I am sent to you by God confirming the Torah that came before me and bringing good news of a messenger to follow me whose name will be Ahmad” (Surah 61:6). Furthermore, as a messenger of Allah, Jesus in the Qur’an also proclaimed the Gospel inviting all to submit to the will of God (Surah 3:50-51). Hence, one sees that the message and life of Jesus provide guidance

⁷⁰¹ Mona Siddiqui. *Christians, Muslims & Jesus*. 2013, p12

⁷⁰² Ibid, p12

to the life of the good Muslim. It is therefore not out of place that Islam considers those who despise the message of the prophets an act of disbelief (Surah 3:84).

6.3.2. The significance of Jesus as the “Servant of Allah”

“He [Jesus] said; ‘I am a servant of God. He has granted me the Scripture; made me a prophet, made me blessed wherever I may be...” (Surah 19:30-32).

As a messenger of Allah, the Qur’an further refers to Jesus as the “Servant of Allah” (*abd-allah*) as we can see in the above text. Other references to this title include Surah 4:172 and 43:59. According to Parrinder, the word *abd* means a servant in the sense of one who is totally submissive to the will of God.⁷⁰³ The submission of oneself totally to God is what is referred to as *islam* and the person who conducts himself/herself this way, is referred to as a *muslim*. As Chittick and Murata puts it, “such a person is called a servant (*abd*) of God and servanthood is looked upon as the highest and most praiseworthy human condition. In a sense, it is even higher than vicegerency and prophecy, since being God’s messenger depends on being his servant”.⁷⁰⁴ To be a servant of God is to worship, obey, show humility and be submissive to God (*ibada*).⁷⁰⁵

While Muhammad is referred to as the servant of God in the Qur’an more than any other prophet (Surah 72:19), Jesus in the Qur’an also said; “I am the servant of God, He has given me the Book and made me a prophet” (Surah 19:30). Here, Jesus is not only known to be a “servant of God”, but is one who truly dedicated his life in serving God. As the Qur’an says, “He (Jesus) is a servant We favoured and have made an example for the children of Israel” (Surah 43:59). Commenting on this text, Muhammad Ali indicated that not only was Jesus a righteous servant of God who received divine favours, but he was also an example of virtue for the Israelites.⁷⁰⁶

Thus, it could be said that Jesus’ life of virtue could also be exemplary to Muslims because Islam understands that “to be a servant of God is to do His bidding and His bidding is set down in the Scriptures and in the words of His prophets. Hence, to be a

⁷⁰³ Geoffrey Parrinder. *Jesus in the Qur’an*. 1965, p34

⁷⁰⁴ Sachiko Murata & William C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. 1994, p124

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid, p125

⁷⁰⁶ Ali Muhammad. *The Holy Qur’an*, p276 in Parrinder, Geoffrey. 1965, p37

servant of God is to submit oneself freely to God”.⁷⁰⁷ This form of submission is necessary for one to be a good Muslim and many Muslims aspire to live this form of holiness of life. If many Muslims today are called *Abdullah*, could it not be that the motivation for taking on this name is because of the interest to be Allah’s faithful servants? The life of Jesus in this context could be an example for them.

6.3.3. The Significance of Jesus as a “Sign from God”

“...I have come to you with a sign from your Lord. Be mindful of God, obey me. God is your Lord and my Lord, so serve Him – that is the straight path” (Surah 3:50-51)

Other references to Jesus as a *sign* in the Qur’an can be found in Surah 19:21, 21:91 and 23:50. Murata and Chittick indicate that the word *sign* appears in the Qur’an about 400 times, with three different uses.⁷⁰⁸ These different usages range from a more general sense such as anything which gives news of something else (Surah 51:20-21), to a slightly specific sense such as the miracles and scriptures that are given to the prophets as proofs that they have come with messages from God (Surah 11:96-97) and in a more specific sense in that “the Qur’an refers to its own words as signs (*aya*), with the term being applied technically to each of the subunits of the Surah” (Surah 12:1-2).⁷⁰⁹ Hence, an *aya* is a proof of God’s presence in His creation, in His message to the prophets and in His Word (the Scriptures).

Consequently, if Jesus in the Qur’an is referred to as a “sign from God”, it goes without saying that by that very designation, Jesus remains an authentic pointer to the existence of God and a proof that the message of the *Injil* as has its source from God. There is great convergence of opinion among Islamic commentators like al-Tabari, al-Zamakhshari and al-Razi that the designation of Jesus as a “sign from God” refers to the miracles that he performed which were meant to authenticate his claim to prophecy. As al-Tabari puts it, the *sign* refers to the miracles Jesus performed to demonstrate to people the

⁷⁰⁷ Sachiko Murata & William C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. 1994, p125

⁷⁰⁸ Sachiko Murata & Williams C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. 1994, p52

⁷⁰⁹ For more information on the four levels of the Qur’anic meaning of the word “sign,” See Sachiko Murata & Williams C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. 1994, p52-53

truthfulness of his claim that he is the prophet of Allah. His power to raise the dead to life, to breathe life into clay birds and to heal the sick all add up as evidence to this claim.⁷¹⁰

According to Murata and Chittick, the Qur'an itself is perceived by Muslims as the speech of God, a direct divine sign of God to humanity; for whatever God says in the Qur'an is an expression of Himself.⁷¹¹ To understand the Qur'an, therefore, is to understand what God is saying to humanity. Hence, in studying the Qur'an, Muslim scholars see every chapter, verse, every word and every letter of the Qur'an as God's self-expression.⁷¹² If the same Qur'an affirms Jesus as a "sign from God" (ayatollah) in some of its chapters and verses, then what message is the "sign" communicating? From the discussions concerning the identity and mission of Jesus as the "prophet of Allah" in the Qur'an, one will not be incorrect to assert that the central thesis of the message of the Qur'anic Jesus is that of the Oneness of God and the human obligation to submit to him.

In conclusion, it could be said that though construed differently as "Son of God" (in Christianity) and the prophet of Allah (in Islam), Jesus Christ towers in significance within the tradition-specific contexts of Christianity and Islam. As God and the "Son of God" in Christianity, Jesus is not only the revelation of God and the bearer of salvation but he also defines and shapes the redeemed life. As the prophet of Allah in Islam, Jesus contributes to giving guidance to all who seek to submit themselves entirely to the will of Allah. He does not only achieve this through his message but also through his exemplary life. Consequently, how can this image of the Qur'anic Jesus and the Jesus of the NT Gospels become contexts for Christian-Muslim dialogue of life and the dialogue of common action? Before we enter into the heart of this praxis of dialogue, let us first of all understand what we mean by the dialogue of life and the dialogue of common action.

6.4. Understanding the Dialogue of Life and the Dialogue of Common Action

In chapter one, we defined interreligious dialogue as "the constructive and positive conversation between people of different religious traditions on issues of religious significance for the purpose of mutual understanding, learning and enrichment". Even

⁷¹⁰ See Chapter four on the Classical Islamic commentaries on Surah 2:87, 2:253 and 5:110

⁷¹¹ Sachiko Murata & Williams C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. 1994, p52

⁷¹² Ibid, p52

though there are different ways of engaging in dialogue such as reciprocal communications and interpersonal communions, we argued that Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology could be more positive and constructive if it is structured against the background of dialogue as an exercise in learning from and about the other. By “positive and constructive”, we mean that form of conversation in which one opens oneself up to the other, truly accepts his points of view as valid and seeks to grasp the substantive rightness of the other’s views on the subject matter of the dialogue.⁷¹³ As we indicated in chapter three, this form of dialogical attitude is a necessary condition for dialogue as an exercise in learning.

In considering the different forms of dialogue, the “Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue” listed the following: “dialogue of life”, the “dialogue of common action”, the “dialogue of theological exchange” and the “dialogue of religious experience”.⁷¹⁴ While the Council views the dialogue of life as the context where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing together their joys and sorrows, their human problems and concerns; it considered the dialogue of common action as that area of interreligious endeavour where the religions collaborate on issues of integral development and human flourishing. Whereas the dialogue of theological exchange focuses on the work of specialists who seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages and those of the other, through theological exchanges in conferences and colloquia; the dialogue of religious experience defines the context where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches e.g. with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God.⁷¹⁵

While it could be said that the preceding discourses on Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology are more akin to the dialogue of theological exchanges on the identity and mission of Jesus Christ, the focus of this chapter is to see how these theological issues provide the appropriate contexts for engaging Christians and Muslims in the dialogues of

⁷¹³ See Hans-Georg Gadamer. *Truth and Methods*. 1989, p361

⁷¹⁴ “Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue: Dialogue and Proclamation.” #42 http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_1905199_1_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html (06/04/2015)

⁷¹⁵ “Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue: Dialogue and Proclamation.” #42 (06/04/2015)

life, of action and of religious experience. Since the thesis of this chapter is “Christian-Muslim Dialogue on Christology for the Promotion of Common Values”, our explicit focus would be how the life and messages of Jesus the “prophet of Allah” (in Islam) and the “Son of God” (in Christianity) provide the appropriate contexts for Christian-Muslim dialogues of life, of common action and of religious experience.

While the praxis of dialogue is often associated with the dialogue of common action, it must be said that the dialogue of common action must not be dissociated from the other forms of dialogue, lest it loses not only its theological foundations but also its connections to the believer’s experience of God and reality. In other words, a Christian-Muslim response to issues of human flourishing would bear little fruit if these actions were not sustained and inspired by the adherents’ knowledge and experience of God and the forms of life these experiences have given rise to in both traditions. In this way, while the dialogue of theological exchange provides the context for engaging in this area of Christian-Muslim dialogue of common action, this form of dialogue cannot succeed if it is without due consideration of the dialogues of life and that of religious experience.

In this way, one could say that the different forms of interreligious dialogue are interconnected such that contacts in daily life and common commitment to action sometimes open up to cooperation in promoting ethical and spiritual values. This could “eventually lead to the dialogue of religious experience in response to the great questions which the circumstances of life do not fail to arouse in the minds of people”.⁷¹⁶ Furthermore, “exchanges at the level of religious experience can give more life to theological discussions. These in turn can enlighten experience and encourage closer contacts”.⁷¹⁷ Thus, what follows below is an attempt to see how the person and message of Jesus Christ in both the Qur’an and in the NT Gospels provides the context for Christian-Muslim conversations in response to God and issues of human flourishing.

It must be however noted here that though the message of Jesus in the Qur’an appears to be directed towards Christians and Jews, this message could be relevant to

⁷¹⁶ “Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue: Dialogue and Proclamation.” #42 (06/04/2015)

⁷¹⁷ Ibid, (06/04/2015)

Muslims on two grounds. First of all, Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the revealed Word of Allah to the prophet Muhammad through the Angel Gabriel. As the revealed Word of Allah, the Qur'an provides divine guidance to all who seek to submit themselves to the will of Allah. It is in this revealed Book of Allah that one finds the message of the Qur'anic Jesus – a message centered on total submission to the will of Allah – “God is my Lord and your Lord, so serve Him – that is the straight path” (Surah 3:51). In this way, the message of the Qur'anic Jesus could be relevant for Muslims since it also focuses on submission of the believer to the will of Allah. Secondly, the Qur'an emphasizes that Muslims should not differentiate among the prophets of Allah since each prophet was sent by Allah with the same message about the submission of believers to the will of Allah (Surah 2:136, 2:285, 3:84). Thus, if Jesus is numbered as one of these prophets of Allah, then his message could be useful to the good Muslim who desires to submit himself to Allah. So, what values can Christians and Muslims learn from each other about the person and message of Jesus Christ in the Qur'an and in the NT Gospels?

6.5. Christology and Christian-Muslim Common Values

The acknowledgement that Jesus Christ towers differently in significance in Christianity and Islam brings us closer to the values he could inspire by his way of life and his teachings, both in the Qur'an and the NT Gospels. From the discourses in chapters four and five which set in defining clarity the Christian and Islamic understandings of Jesus Christ, we find that the overarching focus of Jesus Christ was service to “God and to issues of human flourishing”. One finds these two interests in the Qur'an and in the NT Gospels through his message on the submission of the believer to the will of God on the one hand (Surah 3:51 and Mk 1:15 or Mt 3:2) and on the other, his interest in the poor and the less privileged through the feeding of the hungry, the healing of the sick and deliverance of the possessed and other miracles which brought relief to their beneficiaries (Surah 5:112-114, 3:49 and Mk 6:31-44, 7:31ff, 8:22ff).

Hence, the interest in this section is to see how the person and message of Jesus Christ elicit common values for Christian-Muslim dialogue of life and dialogue of common action. By dialogue of life we mean the interest of Christians and Muslims in

living in an open and neighbourly spirit; sharing together their joys and sorrows, their human problems and concerns. By dialogue of common action, we mean that collective endeavour where Christians and Muslims work together in response to issues of social justice and integral human development.

Since the fundamental focus of this chapter is Christian-Muslim dialogue for the promotion of common values inspired by Jesus Christ, we shall approach this area of dialogue by first of all exploring the Christian-Muslim understandings of these values in the light of their different philosophical and theological traditions. Secondly, we will try to see how Jesus Christ the “prophet of Allah” and the “Son of God” espouses these values within the Qur’an and the NT Gospels. Thirdly, we shall then try to see the common context within which Christians and Muslims could work together to promote these values through the dialogues of life and of common action. Let us now consider some of these values.

6.5.1. The Value of Interreligious Prayer and Submission to God

As we indicated earlier, Islam is a religion of belief which essentially centres on the submission of the believer to the will of God. Here, the oneness of God remains the key focus in all Muslim religiosity. To take the Oneness of God (the *Tawhid*) out of the doctrinal equation of the religion is to totally annihilate the religion. In the Shahada (which means to testify or bear witness) therefore, one finds the fundamental act by which all Islamic activities depend. In the Shahada the believer affirms that “there is no god but one God (*la ilaha illa'llah*) and that Muhammad is God’s messenger (*Muhammadum rasul Allah*)”. Here, Murata and Chittick point out that the Shahada is particularly important to Muslims in that it is “the ritual whereby one submits oneself to God i.e. becomes a Muslim”.⁷¹⁸ Though, theoretically one is obliged to recite the Shahada once in one’s lifetime, practically the Shahada is incorporated into the daily required prayers (*Salat*) such that observing these prayers defines the daily life of the Muslim.

⁷¹⁸ Sachiko Murata & William C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. 1994, p11

Consequently, though “pronouncing the Shahada is all that is necessary for one’s Islam to be acceptable to God”,⁷¹⁹ performing the *Salat* (the ritual prayers) is seen as the “centre-pole” of the religion. As Murata and Chittick puts it, “the Koran commands performance of the *Salat* more than it commands any other activity and the prophetic sayings suggest that God loves the *Salat* more than every other human act”.⁷²⁰ *Salat* here means “to pray or bless”. As a pillar of Islam, *Salat* concerns the five daily ritual prayers which every good Muslim must perform every day. Because of the central place *Salat* occupies in Islam, “the rhythm of life in a traditional Islamic society is largely determined by the five daily prayers.”⁷²¹

According to the Islamic time-reckoning, the first prayer begins at Sunset (in the evening) and the last ends in the afternoon. This means that the whole day in the Muslim’s life is a constant submission to the will of Allah through prayer. Not only does the Muslim submit himself/herself to the will of God through the daily prayers, but these prayers also set the Muslim on the path to holiness: purifying him/her from evil (Surah 11:114), shielding him/her against evil (Surah 29:45), enriching the soul (Surah 13:28) and hence must be performed at the required time (Surah 2:238). All the prophets are said to have performed the *Salat* (Surah 21:71-73).

Having seen the significant place prayer occupies in the life of the Muslim, what can we learn from the image of Jesus in the Qur’an in respect of prayer and submission to the will of God? For the Qur’anic Jesus, prayer and submission to God is central to his life. In terms of submission to God, he says in the Qur’an “Be mindful of God and obey me: God is my Lord and your Lord, so worship Him – that is the straight path” (Surah 3:50-51 and 19:36). In these texts, the Qur’anic Jesus affirms the central place God occupies in human life and the human obligation to submit to him. He demonstrates this by his own submission to the will of God which he considered as “the straight path” (Surah 19:36). Hence, in the Qur’anic Jesus, we find one who surrendered himself to God and invited others to do likewise. He achieves this through his commitment to his prophetic role, his life of prayer and works of charity. This is confirmed in the Qur’an when he said “I am a

⁷¹⁹ Ibid, p11

⁷²⁰ Ibid, p11

⁷²¹ Ibid, p15

servant of God. He has granted me the Scriptures and made me a prophet... He commanded me to pray, to give alms as long as I live” (Surah 19:30-31).

Jesus is therefore presented in the Qur’an as one who perfectly fulfilled his role as the prophet of Allah, especially in his submission to God through prayer and charity, and in his provision of guidance for those who also seek to submit themselves to the will of God. Since the desire of Islam is that all might be submitted to the will of the one God through acts of prayer and charity, Jesus therefore functions as an example, par excellence, to all who wish to be good Muslims. As Ayoub puts it, “indeed the Christ of Muslim piety has continued to be a living personality, humble and pious, forever thundering against the wrongs of society and full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit”.⁷²² Jesus appears in the Qur’an as a holy prophet of Allah and a model for the believer. As the Qur’an itself affirms “the *Messiah*, Jesus, son of Mary will be held in honour in this world and the next” (Surah 3:45).

Within Christianity, Jesus Christ is God or the “Son of God”. Thus, he instructs Christians in respect of the worship of God and love of neighbour. At the start of his public ministry Jesus’ central message was; “repent, for the kingdom of God is close at hand” (Mark 1:15). Apart from his proclamation of the “kingdom of God” where one finds that intimate connection between him and God the Father, the Gospels also present a picture of Jesus Christ who is very committed to prayer and emphasizes its importance to the life of the disciple. For instance, in the prologue of Mark’s Gospel, one sees the intimate connection between Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and God the Father (Mk 1:9-11). In this text, the voice from heaven which says “this is my son, the beloved, in whom I am well pleased” (1:11) demonstrates how committed Jesus was to the divine plan as conceived by the Godhead.

After the baptism, Jesus goes to the desert and spends 40 days and nights in fasting and prayer alone with God (Mk 1:12-13). This will prepare him for his victorious encounter with Satan in the wilderness. After overcoming the devil’s temptations and beginning his ministry, Jesus would always find time to be by himself in a lonely place to

⁷²² Irfan Omar. (ed.). *A Muslim View of Christianity*. 2007, p134

pray (Mk 1:35, Lk 5:16). Before choosing the twelve apostles Jesus went to the mountains to pray about this decision (Mk 3:13 and Lk 6:12-16). Though there are many other occasions whereby Jesus Christ gives significant attention to prayer (see John 17:1-24), what these acts of prayer point to is the example Jesus sets out for the Christian life i.e. one sees in the Gospels that Jesus always found time to pray before making any significant decision or undertaking any significant task in his ministry. By so doing, not only did Jesus demonstrate to his disciples the significance of prayer – “watch and pray so that you do not fall into temptation” (Mt 26:41), but he also taught his disciples how to pray (Lk 11:1-4).

By this constant recourse to prayer at every significant stage of his ministry and by teaching and encouraging the disciples to pray, Jesus Christ demonstrates the significance of prayer in the Christian life. From this exemplary life of Jesus Christ, one could say that not only is daily prayer the best medium of communication with God, but it also reaps benefits for the Christian in the following ways: first of all, it is a means of placing one’s needs and concerns before God (supplication and intercession) who has the power to grant them; secondly, prayer is a means of showing gratitude to God for all the graces and blessings received (thanksgiving); thirdly, prayer provides the platform for living a virtuous life through the confession of one’s sins and the seeking of God’s grace to be good Christians; fourthly, the daily prayer of the Christian is a way of acknowledging the importance of God in his/her life. Thus, one can say that prayer is an important component in the life of every good Christian. For this reason St Paul would tell the Thessalonians to “pray at all times” (1Thess 5:17).

From the above discourses concerning the place and importance of prayer and submission to God in Islam and Christianity on the one hand and how Jesus Christ functions within these two religious traditions on the other, one could say that the significance of prayer and submission to God in the lives of Muslims and Christians cannot be discounted. For instance, while submission to the one God (*Tawhid*) is the essence of Islam, prayer (the *Salat*) is one of the concrete means of demonstrating one’s submission to God. Not only does it purify the soul of the Muslim, it also protects him/her from evil and serves as a means to the blessings of Allah. For Christianity, prayer is not just the key that unlocks the blessings of God to the believer, but it also demonstrates the believer’s

acknowledgement of God as his/her source of being and provident provider. St Paul affirmed this when he said; “it is in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

Jesus Christ as a “prophet of Allah” in Islam and as the “Son of God” in Christianity demonstrates in the Qur’an and in the Gospels the significance of prayer and the submission of the believer to the will of God. In both traditions, Jesus achieves this through the message he proclaimed (Surah 19:36 and Mk 1:15) and through his exemplary life (Surah 19:31 and Mk 3:13). Having lived a life worthy of emulation as a prophet of Allah and as the “Son of God”, Jesus Christ, in both Islam and Christianity, demonstrates that belief in God and fidelity to prayer is capable of bringing the best out of Muslims and Christians, and thus contribute in transforming the world into a better place for all.

However, within our contemporary context, there is the strong force of secularism⁷²³ which thinks otherwise of the significance of faith in God and the relevance of prayer to contemporary society. While in the past, secularism emerged through the demands to be free from any imposition of religious beliefs and practices on those who do not necessarily share them, it has today moved from the level of seeking freedom from religious beliefs and practices to becoming, to puts it rather strongly, “a fierce contender” against everything religious.⁷²⁴ Today, what secularism seeks to achieve is a Godless society, a society that emphasizes the will of man over that of God.

In his considerations of C. G. Brown’s book on *The Death of Christian Britain*, Hakim Murad emphasize that the fact that he finds himself tragically part of this Godless society hurts him deeply, because “what is dying is a set of monotheistic convictions and a life of prayer and human giving”.⁷²⁵ For Murad, secularism is the reason for the death of

⁷²³ While we admit that, “secularism” is not completely the same as “atheism” on the basis that, a secularist is not necessarily an atheist, we can say that they both serve to limit or eradicate the possibility of religious relevance in the shaping of society; for while one seeks for freedom from religion, the other disbelieves and seeks its annihilation. Thus, the common ideal to both positions is the call for a society where there is no trace of God.

⁷²⁴ In Britain for instance, the National Secular Society (NSS) has fought to scrap off Council prayers before and after meetings, the wearing of religious articles in Hospitals, the teaching of Religious Education (RE) in schools and so forth <http://www.secularism.org.uk/> (03/06/2013)

⁷²⁵ Abdal Hakim Murad. “Human Dignity and Mutual Respect,” in *A Common Word: Texts and Reflections*. 2011, p66

Christianity in Europe. Despite the fact that Christianity and Islam have different traditions in respect to religious doctrines and practices, Murad asserts that a Christian Europe would be a better place for Islam than a secular Europe because a Christian Europe offers the space for religious beliefs while a secular Europe seeks to erase the trace of God in it.⁷²⁶ For Murad therefore, secularism poses a mutual challenge to Christianity and Islam and these two communities need to work together to confront what he called “the new barbarians”.⁷²⁷

As Pratt equally noted, secularism with its sequel constitutes a mutual challenge to Christianity and Islam today.⁷²⁸ This challenge lies in how first of all, it denies Christians, Muslims and other religious communities the opportunity to realize themselves and contribute to society through the practice of their religions. Consider for instance, how the National Secular Society (NSS – Britain) recently fought to scrap Council prayers before and after meetings and to abolish the wearing of religious articles in public space. For instance, Nadia Eweida (the British Airways employee) who was asked not to wear her Cross visibly at the check-in counter is a typical example of the powerful influence of a secular society.⁷²⁹ In furtherance to this interest, the British National Secularists Society is campaigning for the abolition of hospital chaplaincies in the National Health Scheme (NHS) and against the teaching of Religious Education (RE) in schools.⁷³⁰ Even though these cases are particular to Britain, they nonetheless point to the agenda every secularist society seek to achieve – the erasure of the trace of religion in society.

Secularism therefore poses a challenge to the existence of Christianity and Islam. This challenge appears to be gaining grounds in the minds of people partly because people are gradually losing faith in the goodness of the religions, not because of the content of their doctrines, but in the living out of these doctrines. The understanding that the religions do not only inculcate and promote social virtues and solidarity in society, but that they also promote socialization, social control, welfare and social cohesion is fast disappearing. This

⁷²⁶ Ibid, p66

⁷²⁷ Ibid, p69

⁷²⁸ Douglas Pratt. *The Challenge of Islam*. 2005, p 207

⁷²⁹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/6165368.stm> (09/03/2015)

⁷³⁰ See the website of the National Secularists Society – Britain: <http://www.secularism.org.uk/> (03/06/2013)]

is because people have long grown tired of seeing how the religions contribute to conflict, wars and social disintegration when they are supposed to be restorers of peace. There are numerous examples of how Christian-Muslim conflicts have destroyed human lives and whole societies.⁷³¹ It is this state of affair which also gives reason to the success of the secularist campaigns.

Consequently, though religions are an invaluable part of the life of man and can contribute significantly in bringing about transformation to society through the virtues they inculcate in the lives of their adherents, they have nonetheless been occasions for wars and conflicts. Thus, how can the exemplary life of Jesus inspire Christians and Muslims to work together to bring transformation to human society? To meet the challenge of secularism today demands mutual efforts between Christianity and Islam. Apart from becoming faithful witnesses to the living out of their respective religious beliefs, Christian-Muslim mutual efforts could be directed towards common actions in response to issues of primal concern to society today. Taking cue from the prayerful life of Jesus, a Christian-Muslim interfaith action could be directed towards *Interreligious prayer* for peace.

By “Christian-Muslim interreligious prayers”, we mean Christians and Muslims setting aside a period of time to be together to pray for a shared intention. It connotes the sense of being together to pray to God for the needs of the world. The “Interreligious prayer” we propose here takes on the theme of the 1986 World Day of Prayer in Assisi: “Being Together to Pray”. As Pope John Paul II indicated “being together to pray” does not mean saying a common prayer, but being present with others to pray.⁷³² In other words, unlike George Dardess and Krier Mich who worked out the possibility of Christian-Muslim common prayers (praying in one voice) through the Encounter between St Francis and the Sultan of Egypt, thereby eliminating the significance of Jesus Christ in the process,⁷³³ we emphasize that Christian-Muslim prayers cannot be said in one voice.

⁷³¹ Not only would one mention the crusades of 1095, but there are even recent examples in Pakistan, Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa where Christian and Muslim conflicts have led to the destruction of life and property (See John Pontifex. *Roll Back the Stone of Fear*. 2005)

⁷³² See Jacques Dupuis. *Christianity and the Other Religions*. 2001, p236

⁷³³ See Dardess, George & Krier Mich, Marvin. *In The Spirit of St. Francis and the Sultan*. 2011, p47, 48-50

Praying in one voice – the kind proposed by Dardess and Krier Mich – is rather problematic. Such prayers demand a unitary content, a common form and language which is impossible considering the fact that there are stark differences between the Christian and Muslim ways of praying. Whereas Christian prayers (for instance Roman Catholic) are very often made through Jesus Christ as the “Son of God”, Muslims do not believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ. Secondly, Arabic is the medium of Islamic prayer which many Christians may not understand. Thus, what becomes of those who do not understand Arabic when Christians and Muslims meet to “pray in one voice”?

Hence, in talking about Christian-Muslim interreligious prayers, we mean the engagement of Christians and Muslims with different liturgical prayers but with a common prayer intention – for instance praying for peace. Here, Christians and Muslims set aside a day for praying for their shared intentions. While sharing the same space and prayer intention they can either pray differently at organized comfort zones or pray in turns. As Pope John Paul II indicated, being together to pray in this manner “takes on a particularly deep and eloquent meaning insofar as all will be there, one next to the other to implore God for the gift that all of humankind most need today in order to survive”.⁷³⁴

It must be noted that though this kind of interreligious prayer could be done without reference to the life and mission of Jesus Christ, it also offers another opportunity for engaging Christians and Muslims in concrete forms of dialogue through Jesus’ exemplary life of prayer. Fostering this form of inter-faith action could lead to the establishment of peace and peaceful co-existence between Christians and Muslims, thereby transforming the communities in which they live. As Pope John Paul II puts it, by being together to pray, we “manifest our respect for the prayer of the others and the stance of the others towards the divine. At the same time, we offer them the humble and sincere testimony of our faith”.⁷³⁵

In this way, when the two religions are seen to be visibly working together in practical contributions to issues of public concern, they would be reasserting their significance in society and thereby counteracting the secularist propaganda about the

⁷³⁴ Jacques Dupuis. *Christianity and the Religions*. 2001, p236

⁷³⁵ Jacques Dupuis. *Christianity and the Religions*. 2001, p236

irrelevance of religion in human society. This could be done without recourse to Jesus Christ, but when the life and mission of Jesus Christ becomes the inspiration for undertaking this kind of inter-faith action, it will not only reduce the tensions between the communities as a result of their differences in understanding Jesus Christ, but it will also introduce a sense of respect and trust in the other who shares the same prayer concerns with me presenting them to God on behalf of me and of the world. Such a Christian-Muslim assent to “being together to pray” could be the greatest source of inter-faith witnessing to the goodness of these religions. Let us now consider “peace and peaceful co-existence” as a common religious value to Christianity and Islam.

6.5.2. The Value of Peace and Peaceful Co-existence

The word “peace” is said to come from the Latin word “pax” which means “freedom from civil disturbance”. “Peace” is a form of personal greetings as in the Hebrew *Shalom* or the Arabic *Salaam*. In these usages, “peace” reinforces the sense of or interest, in establishing harmony in relationships between those who share it. Today, the word “peace” is used variously to suggest a sense of harmony in personal relationships, the absence of conflict or violence, a state of tranquillity, a formal pact to end war between two enemy bodies and so forth. In all its interpersonal, institutional or international usages, what the concept defines is a state of tranquillity and harmony that is informed by a mutual trust and confidence in the other. Whereas this sense of “peace” involves the absence of war, conflict and violence, it is also grounded on the goodwill to promote tranquillity, cordiality and amity. Thus, if “co-existence” means “the willingness to live together despite fundamental differences”, then “peaceful co-existence” denotes the willingness to live together in peace despite differences. How is this sense of peace upheld in the philosophical and theological traditions of Islam and Christianity? How does Jesus Christ espouse it in the Qur’an and in the NT Gospels and how do these serve as contexts for Christian-Muslim collaborations for the promotion of peace and peaceful co-existence? These are the questions which will engage our deliberations in this section.

Islam is said to be a religion of “peace”. This is partly because the word *Islam*, which is derived from the Arabic *Salama* (Š-L-M) means “to be safe, secure or at peace”. Though religiously, “Islam” is taken to mean “submission to the will of Allah”, when one

considers its Arabic roots, it also connotes the sense of “purity or wholeness”, “security” and “peacefulness”. However, it appears that the concepts “submission” and “peace” are more popular in the use of the term than any other meaning. This popularity lies in the fact that as a religion, the word “Islam” refers to the submission of the believer to the will of Allah. To submit oneself to the will of Allah, is to conform to Allah’s divine plan, and to conform to Allah’s divine plan is to fulfil the purpose for which one was created. Fulfilling the purpose for which one is created is to find happiness, peace and tranquillity. Hence, submission to the will of Allah leads to peace.

Within the domain of interpersonal relationships however, “Islam” as *Salama* finds its popularity in the Muslim greetings *al-Salamu ‘alaykum* which means “Peace be upon you”. Here, one could interpret this form of greetings as a reminder to Muslims about their fundamental duty to be agents of peace which finds its fulfilment in being submissive to the will of Allah. But what does “peace” here mean? According to Admet Akgunduz,⁷³⁶ the concept of “peace” in Islam connotes three senses: the eschatological, the psychological and the universal sense. In the eschatological sense, “peace” refers to the ultimate goal of human life, almost synonymous with salvation (Surah 10:25-27). In the psychological sense, “peace” means the “tranquility and peace of mind, an inner confidence born of faith that enables the religious believer to face adversity without anxiety or despair”.⁷³⁷ From the universal sense, it reflects the widespread conviction that a time will come when all sorts of evil and destruction in the world will give way to prosperity and human flourishing.⁷³⁸ These three distinctions of peace can only be realized, as it were, by the utter submission of the believer to the will of God. It is in submitting oneself to the will of God that the individual finds happiness and peace.⁷³⁹ Even though some people conceive that the Qur’an perceives the ideal society to be Dar as-Salam (the

⁷³⁶ Admet Akgunduz is a professor of Islamic studies in Rotterdam, Holland. He is currently the rector of the Islamic University of Rotterdam.

⁷³⁷ Akgunduz, Admet. “Norms and Values in Islam.” http://islam.uga.edu/norms_values.html (09/05/2013)

⁷³⁸ Ibid, (09/05/2015)

⁷³⁹ See Sachiko Murata & Williams C. Chittick. 1994, p3

House of peace),⁷⁴⁰ many Muslims nonetheless understand that the “house of peace” is the abode of all who submit themselves to the Will of Allah.

If in Islam “ideal peace” consists in submitting oneself to the will of Allah, then Jesus was a man of peace par excellence. In the Qur’an one sees that Jesus’ preoccupation was both on his submission to the will of the one God and his proclamation on the human need to submit to God (Surah 19:36, 3:50-51). In other words, as a prophet of Allah, he provided guidance on the need to submit oneself to God as a means of attaining peace.⁷⁴¹ In this way, one could see Jesus as the epitome of peacefulness because the Qur’an affirms that his entire life was marked by peace: “peace was on me the day I was born and will be on me the day I will die and the day I am raised to life again” (Surah 19:33). Thus, though the miracles he performed were meant to be signs pointing to the authenticity of his prophetic calling, these miracles nonetheless contributed to re-establishing harmony and peace in the lives of those who were beneficiaries of them (Surah 3:49, 19:31). In the Qur’anic Jesus one finds an “icon of peace”.

The Christian conception of “peace” rests largely on the Hebrew roots of the word *slm* (shalom) which means “to be complete” or “to live well”. As a Hebraic OT concept, *Shalom* could therefore be understood in four different ways, namely (1) as the wholeness of life and body (health), (2) as the harmonious relationship between people (friendship), (3) as prosperity, success and fulfilment in life (wealth) and (4) as the absence of war or victory over one’s enemies which brings war to an end.⁷⁴² When used in both greetings and farewell, *shalom* is used as a form of blessings on the one to whom it is conferred on (1Samuel 25:6) – i.e. “may your life be filled with health, prosperity, wealth and safety”

In the NT however, the Greek word *eirene* is often used as *peace*. But this sense of “peace” is greatly influenced by the OT concept of *shalom*. However, what is remarkable in all its usage is that “peace” finds its source from God (Judges 6:24). It is God who takes the first step to bring this sense of “peace” – first to the Jews through Abraham and his

⁷⁴⁰ “God invites everyone to the Home of Peace, and guides whoever he wills to the straight path” (Surah 10:25)

⁷⁴¹ Jesus says in the Qur’an: “I have come to you with a sign from your Lord. Be mindful of God, obey me: God is my Lord and your Lord, so obey him – that is a straight path” (Surah 3:50-51).

⁷⁴² See D. J. Harris. *The Biblical Concept of Shalom*. 1970, p75

descendants, and then to both Jews and Gentiles through Jesus Christ. Through the covenant of peace God established, all who are faithful to this covenant are rewarded with peace. Hence, “peace” is the result of being faithful to God. Peace is an indication of God’s blessings for one’s obedience (Isaiah 48:18 and Luke 7:50).

Since “peace” is attained through one’s obedience to God, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ brought about the peace of God to fallen humanity. As Paul puts it, “just as one man’s disobedience many are made sinners, so also by one man’s obedience, many are made righteous” (Romans 5: 17-19). In this way, “peace” is viewed as an essential hallmark of Christian virtue. To be a “Christian” means to be a follower of Christ, and to be a follower of Christ is to observe the divine command to “love God above all things and love one’s neighbour as oneself (Mark 12:30-31). This command to love demands obedience, and it is this obedience which brings peace to the believer. As the Scriptures imply, “there can be no peace for the wicked (Isaiah 48:22), but “glory, honour and peace comes to everyone who does good” (Romans 2:9-10).

In the NT, Jesus Christ demonstrated in both word and deed his desire to bring peace to the world and to the hearts of all who were troubled (Mt 11:27). Referred to as the “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6), Jesus Christ was preoccupied with proclaiming and establishing “the kingdom of God” through repentance (Mt 4:12-17). The purpose was to establish a state of relationships wherein persons, societies and nations can live together in harmony and tranquillity. For St. Paul says “He himself is our peace” (Eph 2:14). Thus, from the accounts of the Gospels, one sees a Jesus who was a lover of peace, a promoter of peace and the giver of it. He says in John’s Gospel: “peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you, a peace which the world cannot give, this is my gift to you” (Jn 14:28).

As we indicated earlier in chapter four, Jesus’ message of repentance and forgiveness in the Gospels was meant to re-establish the peace destroyed by sin and evil. He healed the sick, set captives free, raised the dead and stood against the oppressive structures of society – all in view of re-establishing harmony and tranquillity in it. After his resurrection from the dead his first gift to the disciples was peace: “Peace be with you!” (Jn 20:19-21). For this reason, Christianity conceives living peacefully and promoting peace in society as essentially part of its evangelizing mission. As Pope John Paul II puts it in his

address at the Assisi World Day of Prayer for peace; “in Jesus Christ, as Saviour of all, true peace is to be found, ‘peace to those who are far off and peace to those who are near.’ His birth was greeted by the angels’ song: ‘Glory to God in the highest and peace among men with whom he is pleased.’ He preached love among all, even among foes, proclaimed blessed those who work for peace and through his Death and Resurrection he brought about reconciliation between heaven and earth ”.⁷⁴³

In response to the call to promote peace in the world, the Church continues to preach the message of peace in the manner handed down to her by Jesus Christ in the Gospels through her interpretations of the “signs of the times” and her provision of the road map to world peace and peaceful co-existence. In the Roman Catholic Church, one finds some of these peace proposals in Papal encyclicals such as *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth -1963) and *Populorum Progressio* (The Development of Peoples – 1967).⁷⁴⁴ In *Pacem in Terris*, Pope John XXIII outlined the blueprint of peace for the world. According to him, if we want peace for the world, then there is a moral order which we must all strive to pursue.⁷⁴⁵ This moral order which prevails in society is to be grounded on truth, it must function according to the norms of justice, be inspired and perfected by mutual love and brought to an ever more refined and human balance in freedom.⁷⁴⁶ This moral order “whose principles are universal, absolute and unchangeable has its ultimate source in the one true God, who is personal and transcends human nature ”.⁷⁴⁷ If human society is to find lasting peace, it would need to order its ways according to the ways of God who has made himself known in Jesus Christ. So as followers of Christ, Christians are called both to live and to promote peace according to the example of Jesus Christ.

⁷⁴³ Pope John Paul II: “Address to the Representatives of the Christian Churches and to the Ecclesial Communities and to the World Religions” (October 27, 1986). http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1986/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19861027_prayer-peace-assisi-final.html (14/04/2015)

⁷⁴⁴ See Pope Paul VI. *Populorum Progressio* #1). Essentially, the emphasis of this encyclical is that: building peace means pursuing development. Pursuing development means pursuing justice for all, and pursuing justice for all means following a moral order.

⁷⁴⁵ “Peace on Earth—which man throughout the ages has so longed for and sought after—can never be established, never guaranteed, except by the diligent observance of the divinely established order.” (See John XXIII. *Pacem in Terris: Encyclical on Establishing Universal in Truth, Justice and Liberty* (1963). 2002, p3)

⁷⁴⁶ Pope Saint John XXIII. *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth, 1963) #37

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid, #38

From the above discourses on “peace”, one could conceptually say that Islam and Christianity are religions of peace. Though each tradition understands “the gift of peace” as essentially part of faith practice, can one however boast of the existence of “peace” within and between them in the midst of the many conflicts which are partly created by Christians and Muslims? According to Pratt, “all too often it seems that religions, especially – but not only – Christianity and Islam, are caught in an apparent hypocrisy. For even as religions actively promote peace, they nevertheless can be found endorsing and blessing the battle-tanks of military might ”.⁷⁴⁸ Whereas Islam and Christianity are supposed to be religions of peace, there are records in their historical annals where Muslims and Christians endorsed directly or indirectly, wars and conflicts.⁷⁴⁹ There are instances aplenty where Muslims and Christians engage in very destructive conflicts and violence against themselves (intrareligious conflicts) and against each other (interreligious conflicts).

Typical examples of Christian-Muslim intrareligious conflicts include the age-old conflicts between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland⁷⁵⁰ and the current conflicts between the Shi’ites and Sunni in Iraq. Consider also the interreligious conflicts demonstrated in the oppression of Christians in Pakistan and the burning of Christian Churches in places like Egypt and Iraq. In Sub-Saharan Africa, one needs to only look at Sudan where Arab Muslims in the North slaughtered more than one million black Christians from the South.⁷⁵¹ The statistics in Nigeria are even more alarming. More recently, a renewed wave of conflicts between Christians and Muslims in central Nigeria has claimed the lives of thousands of people. For instance, Angela Kariuki reports that from January 2010 to 2015 more than ten thousand people lost their lives through Christian-Muslim conflicts in Nigeria.⁷⁵² It is also reported that in July 2013, an Islamic classroom in which 5 to 8 year-olds were studying Arabic and the Qur’an in Southern Nigeria was bombed. Seven pupils were injured.

⁷⁴⁸ Douglas Pratt. *The Challenge of Islam*. 2005, p189

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid, p101-116

⁷⁵⁰ Joseph Liechty. “Testing the depth of Catholic/Protestant Enmity: the Case of Thomas Leland’s History of Ireland 1773,” in *Reconciling Memories*. 1998, p108-124

⁷⁵¹ John Pontifex (editor). *Roll Back the Stone of Fear*. 2005, p56-58

⁷⁵² Angela Kariuki. “Violence begets Violence: Nigeria’s Deadly Religious History.” http://www.consultancyafrica.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=367&Itemid=218 (14/04/2015)

Though one must not be too quick to identify all these conflicts as religious by nature, the fact that most of them assume a religious turn in the end is a cause for worry. In other words, the fact that Muslims and Christians who are supposed to be people of peace, rather participate in these conflicts makes one wonder whether the essence of the religions are being upheld by their respective adherents. As Pratt puts it, “the world looks on aghast at the terror and havoc that are once again wrought in the name of religion or a religious ideology”.⁷⁵³ In the eyes of the world, these instances of Christian-Muslim conflicts are huge dents (counter-witnesses) in the image of Christianity and Islam which are supposed to be religions of peace.

Consequently, some scholars believe that “if there is ever to be a lasting peaceful cohabitation of human communities, not to mention the prospects of a just and ecologically sustainable future for all, then religion is going to have to back off”.⁷⁵⁴ For Kung, however, there can be “no world peace without peace among the religions, no peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions and no dialogue between the religions without accurate knowledge of one another”.⁷⁵⁵ Christianity and Islam together make up over half of the world’s population. “Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world. The future of the world depends on peace between Christians and Muslims”.⁷⁵⁶

If there is to be peace between Christians and Muslims, then this has to come through dialogue between them, and dialogue creates the opportunity for the religions to find meaningful ways by which religious communities can live in peace and become agents of peace and peaceful co-existence. This explains why we propose the person and mission of Jesus Christ as the context for these peace initiatives. From the image of the Qur’anic Jesus and that of the Jesus of the NT Gospels, we find common elements of “peace” and “working for peace”. Not only did Jesus say in the Qur’an that ““peace was on me the day I was born and will be on me the day I will die and the day I am raised to life again” (Surah 19:33), but his first gift after the resurrection was “peace” which he

⁷⁵³ Douglas Pratt. *The Challenge of Islam*. 2005, p189

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid, p189

⁷⁵⁵ Leonard, Swidler (ed.). *Towards a Universal Theology of Religion*. 1988, p194

⁷⁵⁶ Lejla Demiri (Editor). *A Common Word: Texts and Reflections*. 2011, xix

offered to the Apostles who were caught up in fear of the Jews – “peace be with you” (Jn 20:19). Hence, what one finds common between the Qur’anic Jesus and the Jesus of the NT is the emphasis on the significance and need for peace.

In today’s world where there is growing injustice, ethnic and religious conflicts, civil wars, terrorism, national and international conflicts within which Christians and Muslims are sometimes the protagonists, the message and person of Jesus could become a wakeup call to these two religions to rethink their essence and relevance as religions of peace. How then can the life and message of Jesus Christ provide a context for Christian-Muslim collaborations in response to the need for peace and peaceful co-existence? It is here that *interreligious prayers for peace* could be a useful tool. As we indicated earlier on, by “interreligious prayer”, we mean Christians and Muslims coming together to pray in different ways but with a shared intention i.e. the gift of peace which only resides in God and is freely bestowed on those who submit themselves to him.

By praying together for world peace, not only will this form of interfaith action lead to the nurturing of trust and respect between Christians and Muslims, but it could also bring about peace in their communities and in the wider world. Additionally, when Christians and Muslims are seen to share a common space with common prayer intentions for peace in the world, it could be a means of demonstrating to the world the peaceful relationships between two faith traditions. In other words, praying together for “world peace” could be a source of *witness* to the world about the Christian-Muslim resolve to contribute to the greatest gift the world needs, peace. Let us now consider another value of great significance i.e. *solidarity with the poor and the marginalized*.

6.5.3. The Value of Solidarity with the Poor and the Marginalized

The concept *solidarity* generally refers to ties which bind people together whether as a group, a community or a society. The bases for these social ties vary from kinship to shared values. By using the concept in relation to offering support to the poor and the marginalized, solidarity finds its basis from “our common humanity”.⁷⁵⁷ It is about valuing

⁷⁵⁷ It is the understanding that we are all one family created by God and placed in the world. Hence, building a community or communities that empower each individual to realize their full human potential is

other people and respecting their dignity and integrity. In his encyclical letter “*Sollicitudo rei socialis* – ‘On Social Concern’ 1987”, Pope John Paul II indicated that solidarity “is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all”.⁷⁵⁸ In connection with this sense of solidarity, *Gaudium et Spes* also emphasizes that “the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well”.⁷⁵⁹

The understanding of human solidarity in Islam is not different from the sense of solidarity noted above. Accordingly, the prophet Muhammad once said: “in the sight of God, all people are equal like the teeth of a comb and nobody may be deemed better than another except based on piety and good works”.⁷⁶⁰ This Sunnah of the prophet points to the universal dignity of all human beings. This sense of equality in dignity emanates, on the one hand, from God’s breath of life into Adam (Surah 7:11) and on the other, his appointment of Adam as the vicegerent (Khalifa) to the rest of creation (Surah 2:30-33). Adam and Eve are known to be the first human beings God created. They are the prototype of the human race. What is therefore said about them in the Qur’an has something to do with the whole of humanity.⁷⁶¹ God did not only create them, but he also entrusted the care of creation to them and their descendants (Amana). Hence, the equality of human dignity comes from this “common humanity”. As Mona Siddiqui puts it, “in the Qur’an, at least human beings carry an inherent dignity and honour conveyed in the very manner of their creation”.⁷⁶²

seen as our common responsibility. This culture of solidarity is more urgent today in the face of the many situations of inequality, poverty and injustice. (See John Paul II. *Sollicitudo rei socialis* – “On Social Concern” 1987, #37)

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid, #38

⁷⁵⁹ Austin Flannery (ed.). *Vatican Council II: “Gaudium et Spes”* #1

⁷⁶⁰ See “Human Solidarity in Islam.”

<http://www.islamforchristians.com/human-solidarity-islam/> (10/04/2015)

⁷⁶¹ S. Murata & W. C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. 1994, p135

⁷⁶² Mona Siddiqui “Being Human in Islam,” in *Humanity: Texts and Contexts*. 2011, p17

In Islam therefore, through Adam and Eve, Allah bestows a common dignity (the gift of life) and vocation (*Amana*)⁷⁶³ to the rest of humanity. As Allah declared in the Qur'an: "We have bestowed dignity on the progeny of Adam (*wa laqad karramna bani Adama*) and conferred on them special favours above a great part of our creation" (Surah 17:70). This sense of dignity is seen as the basis of human solidarity. In Islam, though solidarity begins from kinship and extends to neighbours,⁷⁶⁴ the aim is nonetheless the recognition of the ties that bind human beings together and the need to "take care of the other" as a consequence of these human ties and responsibilities. Here, when human solidarity is directed towards ending poverty and achieving shared prosperity this is concretely expressed through *Sadaqa* and *Zakat* – the third pillar of the religion.

In respect to Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology, Christian-Muslim solidarity in support of the poor and marginalized in society, could therefore focus on retrieving internal resources from the words and deeds of Jesus as a basis for collective actions in response to the needs and concerns of the poor and marginalized. Here, the two relevant questions which might guide this discourse are: what are the philosophical and theological foundations of Islamic charity? How does the Qur'anic Jesus function within this context in terms of the response to the needs of the poor and marginalized and how do such accounts serve to motivate a Muslim response to the needs of the poor and marginalized? While these questions equally apply to Christianity and Christian living, the attention would be to see how Jesus' fundamental option for the poor and the marginalized could become a context for Christian-Muslim collective action in response to situations of poverty and marginalization in society.

The Islamic institutional action in response to the needs of the poor and the marginalized in society is captured in *zakat* and *sadaqa*. *Zakat* is the third pillar of Islam

⁷⁶³ *Amana* refers to "the Trust" i.e. the moral responsibility of fulfilling one's obligations due to Allah and fulfilling one's obligations due to the rest of creation (Surah 33:72). (See Murata, S. & Chittick, W, C. *The Vision of Islam*. 1994, p134-137)

⁷⁶⁴ Whereas *kinship* connotes blood affinity, *Tafsir al-Manar* quotes a *hadith* which says: "There are three kinds of neighbours. A neighbour who enjoys three rights: neighbourhood rights, kinship rights and the rights of Islam; a neighbour who enjoys two rights: neighbourhood rights and the rights of Islam; and the neighbour who enjoys only the rights of neighbourhood" (see Bouhdiha, Abdelwahab & Muhammad Ma'ruf al-Dawalibi (eds.). *The Different Aspects of Islamic Culture: The Individual and the Society in Islam*. 1998, p238)

and it concerns the payment of some percentage of an individual's wealth, property or profits in lieu of helping the poor and needy in the community. According to the Qur'an, beneficiaries of this charity are: the needy, the poor, the collectors of the *zakat*, those whose hearts are to be reconciled to Islam, captives, debtors, those fighting in God's path and travellers (Surah Surah 9:60). To emphasize the importance of this religious exercise, the Qur'an emphasizes that "goodness does not consist in turning your face to the East or the West. The truly good are those who believe in God and the Last Day ...those who give away some of their wealth to orphans, the needy, the traveller and beggars and to liberate those in bondage" (Surah 2:177). *Zakat* therefore represents the Muslim obligation to give alms to the poor and needy in society.⁷⁶⁵

However, *sadaqa* represents beneficent giving. It is an act of giving which is done out of compassion, love, generosity and friendship. *Sadaqa* is given voluntarily out of love for God and for his creation.⁷⁶⁶ As the Qur'an says, "prophet, have you considered the person who denies the judgement? It is he who pushes aside the orphan and does not urge others to feed the needy" (Surah 107:1-2). For Amy Singer, these verses "present the orphan as the paradigmatic needy figure and food as the most fundamental form of assistance".⁷⁶⁷ Whereas paying the *zakat* is considered incumbent on every Muslim, offering *sadaqa* is however a voluntary act of charity. Yet, both are directed towards God in intent.⁷⁶⁸ Whereas Murata and Chittick indicate that, "just as *ablution* purifies the body and *Salat* purifies the soul, so also *zakat* purifies possessions and makes them pleasing to God,"⁷⁶⁹ the failure to pay one's *zakat* is however considered as a form of apostasy and defaulters are punished for it.⁷⁷⁰ However, *sadaqa* serves as expiation for sin and grants rewards to the giver in the next life (Surah 57:18).

As a consequence, to be a good Muslim does not only consist in confessing the *Shahada* and observing the ritual daily prayers (*Salat*), but it also consists of helping the poor and the needy in society through the payments of the *zakat* and beneficent giving

⁷⁶⁵ Amy Singer. *Charity in Islamic Societies*. 2008, p34

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid, p18

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid, p18

⁷⁶⁸ Amy Singer. *Charity in Islamic Societies*. 2008, p34

⁷⁶⁹ Sachiko Murata & Williams C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. 1994, p16

⁷⁷⁰ Mustafa Koylu. *Islam and Its Quest for Peace: Jihad, Justice and Education*. 2003, p88

(*sadaqa*). Here, it is said that *zakat* makes it possible to achieve two goals simultaneously: the first is material and immediate (i.e. the economic autonomy of the individual who receives it); the second is the spiritual and long term (i.e. helping the individual beneficiary to become a fully fledged Muslim who can in turn pay the *zakat*).⁷⁷¹ In this way, *zakat* “introduces a new form of solidarity which maintains social peace while upholding the dignity of man”.⁷⁷² Here, the recipients *zakat* and *sadaqa* are the poor, the needy, slaves, the collectors of *zakat*, converts to Islam, debtors, jihadists and wayfarers (Surah 9:60). How does this form of solidarity play out in the life of the Qur’anic Jesus?

Jesus in the Qur’an states that “I am a servant of God... He commanded me to pray, to give alms as long as I live and to cherish my mother” (Surah 19:30-31). Furthermore, even though the Qur’anic interpretations of the miracles of Jesus (Surah 3:49) are seen as signs meant to authenticate his prophetic claims, these miracles were nonetheless the concrete expression of Jesus’ response to the needs of those who benefited from them (Surah 10:28-30) through the provision of food to the hungry (Surah 5:113-115), sight to the blind, healing to the leprosy and life to the dead (Surah 3:49-50). Thus, according to Ayoub, “the miracles that the Qur’an attributes to Jesus during his ministry are miracles of life and healing... The Qur’an credits Jesus alone among the prophets with raising the dead, giving sight to those born blind and healing the lepers and the sick”.⁷⁷³ The basis of these miracles is the transmission of life, love and healing in view of promoting human flourishing.

From a Christian perspective, man (i.e. humanity) is viewed as created in the image of God (*Imago Dei* – Genesis 1:27).⁷⁷⁴ Man is also by nature a social being who realizes himself by living in solidarity with others.⁷⁷⁵ According to *Gaudium et Spes*, by his Fatherly care for all of us “God desired that all men should form one family and deal with each other in a spirit of brotherhood... since they have been created in the likeness of

⁷⁷¹ Bouhdiha, Abdelwahab & Muhammad Ma’ruf al-Dawalibi (editors). *The Different Aspects of Islamic Culture*. 1998, p245

⁷⁷² Ibid, p245

⁷⁷³ Mahmoud Ayoub. *A Muslim View of Christianity*. 2007, p114

⁷⁷⁴ “God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27)

⁷⁷⁵ *Gaudium et Spes* #12

God”.⁷⁷⁶ Consequently, love of God translated into tangible acts of love for one’s neighbour remains an essential hallmark of Christian identity. Christian love is not one of mere theoretical expression without practical orientations, it is a love based on self-sacrifice for the sake of the beloved. It is a love measured by Jesus’ statement that “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lays down his life for his friends” (Jn 15:13). Jesus will later demonstrate this by his own sacrifice on the cross.

It is on the basis of the above sense of love that Christian *charity* understood as “giving assistance to the needy” is derived. Here, charity concerns the love shared with the needy, and hence to God through beneficent acts of kindness. This act of giving is different from philanthropic acts in that, while philanthropic acts are done out of the sheer commitment to enhance the quality of another’s life, Christian charity is an act of mercy performed to relieve the suffering of others. Here, God is the source of the motivation to give to the other because the giver knows that the help given is also in a way given to God.⁷⁷⁷

From the section concerning Jesus as the “Son of God” in chapter three, we indicated that most of the miracles Jesus performed were not just for the sake of demonstrating his divine power, but were intended to ameliorate the sufferings of the people concerned. This is ascertained by Jesus’ own “mission statement” in Luke’s Gospel: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (Lk 4:18-21). The Gospels therefore present the whole life of Jesus as predominantly marked by this attention to the needs of the poor, the less privileged, the social outcast and the down trodden (see Mk 1:29, 40; 3:1; 4:35; 5:1).⁷⁷⁸ This mission statement of Jesus Christ is also the mission statement of the Church’s evangelizing mission: “to proclaim the good news to the poor, to bring liberty to the captives, sight to the blind, to set the downtrodden

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid, #24

⁷⁷⁷ “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Mathew 25:40).

⁷⁷⁸ In these texts, Jesus is said to have healed the blind, cleansed lepers, calm the storm at sea and healed the Gerasene demoniac.

free and to proclaim God's year of favour". It is a mission which is geared towards promoting the integral development of the human person.

Today, poverty and disease have become globalized and threaten the very survival of the human race and the dignity of the human person. As our communities and cities are fast becoming multicultural and multi-religious, so is poverty and disease sweeping through these communities and cities – reducing many families to subhuman lives.⁷⁷⁹ As Knitter puts it, "if Jesus reminded us that the poor are always among us (Mt 26:11), they are with us today in ever greater and staggering numbers and with a presence that insists on having a place in our awareness".⁷⁸⁰ Over the centuries, Christians and Muslims have worked independently in response to the needs of the poor and marginalized in their respective communities of faith – very often directing their acts of kindness and charity to those who belong to their respective communities.

However, many societies today are fast becoming multicultural and multi-religious whereby Christians and Muslims find themselves sharing the same space and being confronted by similar economic, social and political challenges. The growth of capitalism today has seen an upper surge in the number of people who have fallen below the poverty line even in developed countries. This has made the cry of the poor and the marginalized an insurmountable one. In most of these multi-religious societies where "the rivalries of whole continents are forced to live cheek by jowl within single blocks,"⁷⁸¹ the face of the suffering other may not always be a Muslim or Christian face and likewise the benevolent giver. This poses mutual challenges to Christians and Muslims.

The challenge first of all lies in the fact that the suffering other who genuinely stands in need of help from either a Christian or Muslim may not bear the same religious badge of identity. Must their needs be ignored because they do not share the belief-systems? The second challenge concerns the situation where demand outgrows supply in one religious community and not another. Must not the privileged community help the overwhelmed one to respond to the needs of the suffering other even though they do not

⁷⁷⁹ The glaring situations in some countries in Africa, Asia and South America cannot be overlooked. The homeless and the destitute in the big cities of the West is a challenge to well-minded people.

⁷⁸⁰ Paul, F. Knitter. *One Earth Many Religions*. 1996, p58

⁷⁸¹ Michael Barnes. *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*. 2002, p4

share the same traditions? Thus, the increasing numbers of the cries of the poor and the marginalized and the religious duty to respond to them poses mutual challenges to Islam and Christianity. These mutual challenges call for mutual efforts through collaborative actions in response to the needs of the poor and the marginalized.

It is in the light of the above need for collective action in response to the needs of the poor and the marginalized that the life and mission of Jesus Christ could inspire such actions. As we saw earlier, Jesus in both the Qur'an and in the Gospels never overlooked the cry of the poor and the marginalized irrespective of their religious affiliations. He fed them, healed them and gave them life. If Jesus was so attentive to the needs of the poor, the sick and the marginalized in this manner both in the Qur'an and in the Gospels, then Christians and Muslims who make up more than 50% of the world's population,⁷⁸² could bring about positive changes to society if they embark on such collective actions in response to the suffering other in the communities they find themselves.

By engaging in such collective works of charity, not only would Christians and Muslims be fulfilling the responsibility of caring for the other entrusted to them by God, these acts would also bring relief to the suffering others who live at the margins of society. In this way, not only will society be transformed through these services but these collective actions could further lead to trust and respect for the religious other who does not share one's religious beliefs, but with whom one can humbly stand together, offering help to a suffering other despite the differences in beliefs. Though these forms of collaborative actions need to be carefully planned by the communities concerned, they could nonetheless become a great source of witnessing to the goodness of the religions.

Collective actions have greater force of effect than isolated ones. As Pope John Paul II once puts it, "the obligation to commit oneself to the development of peoples is not just an individual duty and still less an individualistic one, as if it was possible to achieve this development through the isolated efforts of each individual".⁷⁸³ This form of Christian-Muslim interfaith action could be undertaken without recourse to a "Jesus-

⁷⁸² It is estimated that there are 2.1 billion Christians and 1.6 billion Muslims in the world – representing about 54% of the world's population.

⁷⁸³ Pope John Paul II. *Sollicitudo rei socialis* – "On Social Concern" 1987, #32

catalyst” or the conscious efforts to see such actions as inspired by Jesus. However, where this is done, it may have the potential to further mend the already fractured relations between Christians and Muslims partly because of their different christological understandings.

6.6. Conclusion

Leirvik Oddbjørn asserts that in Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology “what is called for is rather a dialogue among partners that are willing to dive into the depths of the other’s well-spring, not for the rebirth of some kind of universal religion, but for the sake of deeper understanding not only of the other, but equally of oneself”.⁷⁸⁴ Whereas, we do agree with Leirvik that the right approach to Christian-Muslim conversations on Christology is dialogue as an exercise in learning from and about the other, it is our conviction that such dialogues could also be directed to the promotion of common values where possible.

The attention to this common-values-goal is because, even though Jesus Christ is differently construed in Islam and Christianity, he nonetheless plays significant roles in both religions. Hence, Jesus functions in varying degrees of significance in Islam and Christianity. On the one hand, he appears a *barrier* to Christian-Muslim relations, yet on the other he could be a *bridge* to these relations. Thus, dialogue needs to engage this dialectics of *bridge* and *barrier* in order to learn about the traditions of the other more authentically, to reach a profound understanding of the home tradition and hence live more creatively with other.

While the rest of the chapters focused on the first two goals of dialogue (i.e. to know oneself more profoundly and to know the other more authentically), the efforts in this chapter have been geared towards the interest to live more creatively with the other through dialogue of life and dialogue of common action. We sought to do this through what we consider as common Christian-Muslim values inspired by Jesus the “prophet of Allah” and Jesus the “Son of God”. These values included: “interreligious prayer and submission to God”, “peace and peaceful co-existence” and “solidarity with the poor and

⁷⁸⁴ Leirvik, Oddbjørn. *The Image of Jesus Christ in Islam*. 2010, p4

the marginalized ”. Not only does Jesus live out these values in the Qur’an and the Gospels, but he also promoted them through his role as “prophet of Allah” and as “Son of God”.

CHAPTER SEVEN

7. CONCLUSION, EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. Conclusion

At the start of this dialogical journey, we indicated that while Christology is contentious in Christian-Muslim conversations, such contentions will continue to grow and escalate if the three traditional paradigms of dialogue continue to define and shape the nature of dialogue today. As it were, not only does exclusivism privilege one's tradition against all others, but inclusivism patronises other traditions as less or partial versions of what is realized in only one, and pluralism argues for the relativizing of all others including one's own.⁷⁸⁵ If mutual learning and understanding and peaceful co-existence are listed among the intended goals of dialogue today, then these paradigms need to give way to new and better ways of dialoguing with the other.

Consequently, it was in response to the need for new and better ways of engaging the other in meaningful and beneficial dialogues which take the self and the other's views seriously that we proposed Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology as an exercise in learning. The interest to learn from the other implies letting the other tell me something about themselves. It implies a sense of openness to the other where one does not privilege one's views over other's (exclusivism) or consider the other's views as partial versions of one's own (inclusivism) or presuppose that the other's views are more or less the same as one's own (pluralism). Dialogue as an exercise in learning is also about being open to listen to what the other has to say about themselves.

To achieve this end, we proposed comparative theology and Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self as the theological approach and hermeneutic framework which support reflections on this form of dialogue as an exercise in learning. Not only does comparative theology deal with the correlation of the theological themes, concepts and methods of the other religions in order to learn and understand them, it also asserts that a deeper interest and learning of the traditions of the religious other through shared experience is necessary for an understanding of the religious other. It emphasizes on one's

⁷⁸⁵ Michael Barnes. *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*. 2002, p8

commitment to the home tradition and respect for the traditions of the other. Thus, we argued in chapter two that comparative theology is both confessional and constructive. However, in its work of crossing over to other religions to compare theological themes and doctrines, comparative theology also faces questions which involve the epistemological validity and the ethical “allowability” for such crossings.

In response to these questions, we turned to Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self (narrative identity). Through *Oneself As Another*, we demonstrated how Ricoeur’s mediation of the tensions between Descartes “exalted cogito” and Nietzsche’s demolition of it led to his concept of “*attestation*” as the equidistance between the two polarities. As the “wounded cogito” which is capable of affirming itself as oneself acting and suffering, we presented *attestation* as establishing a gesture of trust and *belief-in* oneself. Understood interreligiously, it conveys the sense of the mutual sharing of testimonies of faith between the self and the other. Thus, we argued that when dialogue as an exercise in learning is structured on Ricoeurean notion of *attestation* as the sharing of mutual testimonies of faith, it removes dialogue from the contentions of “claim and counterclaim” and places it within the context of mutual sharing, listening and learning.

Here, learning takes place when one narrates or shares with the other, one’s stories about the identity and mission of Jesus Christ as they pertain to one’s tradition. But this learning from the other involves crossing-over to their tradition to learn and understand concepts and practices. In response to the question what is the epistemological and ethical allowability for such crossing, we argued that Ricoeur shows how sometimes the narration of the stories of our lives (narrative identity) discloses the contributions others make to our narratives and we theirs. Thus, we argued that this possibility of narrative intertwinements serves as the epistemological basis for crossing over to learn from the traditions of the other because of the potential enrichment this might bring to oneself. Where questions of intratextuality are raised, Ricoeur proposes *translation* as the means of understanding texts and doctrines that are other than one’s own.

On the ethical plane, we relied on Ricoeur’s “little ethics” as the basis for reflecting on the ethical issues which arise when engaging in dialogue with the other as an exercise in learning. Here, we identified *commitment*, *openness*, *respect* and *equality* as the necessary

conditions (appropriate dialogical attitudes) for dialogue as an exercise in learning. We used Ricoeur's notion of the "ethical intention" as the hermeneutic framework for reflecting on the challenges posed by the above conditions. Ricoeur's "ethical intention" has three components: (1) the Good life, (2) with and for others, (3) in just institutions. While the first component provided the context for reflecting on the meaning and significance of *commitment*, the second component set the framework for reflecting on the challenges of *respect and openness* in dialogue. "Just institutions" provided the context for reflecting on the principle of *equal-partners-in-dialogue*.

In the final analysis, our emphasis has been that comparative theology and Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self make meaningful and constructive contributions to Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology as an exercise in learning. As an exercise in learning, not only does dialogue take seriously the "tradition-specific understandings" of the Christologies of the interlocutors concern, it is also guided by the principles of respect and openness to learn from these traditions while viewing the other as equal-partner-in-dialogue. To achieve this end, we committed chapter four as the platform for engaging the Christian and Islamic tradition-specific perspectives on Christology. Here, we focused specifically on the Christology of Mark's Gospel and "Qur'anic Christology".

By engaging these two forms of Christology, we discovered that though different, they demonstrate how Jesus Christ could be seen as both *bridge* and *barrier* to Christian-Muslim relations: *bridge* because Christianity and Islam share similar theological concepts and themes which relate to the life and mission of Jesus Christ and *barrier* because most of these concept are understood differently in the light of the fact that Jesus is a "prophet of Allah" in Islam and the "Son of God" in Christianity. Hence, in chapter five, we focused on comparative theological exercises on common christological themes such as: *word of God, spirit of God, Messiah, the virginal conception, the miracles Jesus performed, the crucifixion, death and resurrection, the Ascension and second coming of Jesus*. These christological themes are correlated in their tradition-specific contexts. In doing so, we discovered that though understood as a "prophet of Allah" in Islam and "Son of God" in Christianity, Jesus nonetheless occupies significant places in Islam and Christianity.

For instance, while he is the historical point of departure and culmination for Christian faith and theology, Jesus is also seen in Islam as the closest friend of Allah (Surah 3:45) and the guarantor of the coming of the prophet Muhammad (Surah 61:6). With these varying degrees of “Jesus-significance” in both religions, the questions then were: what values does the Qur’anic Jesus (the prophet of Allah) inspire within Islam as a religion and what might Christians learn from these values? What values does Jesus Christ (the Son of God) inspire in Christianity and what might Muslims learn from these values?

It was in response to the above questions that we discerned values such as “prayer and submission to God”, “peace and peaceful co-existence” and “solidarity with the poor and the marginalized” and proposed them for Christian-Muslim dialogues of life and of common action in chapter six. Reflections on these values are based on how they are understood in the philosophical and theological traditions of both faiths, their significance within the traditions, how they are related to Jesus Christ in the Qur’an and in the NT Gospels and how they offer common grounds for Christian-Muslim collective actions in response to God and to issues of human flourishing.

7.2. The Evaluation of the Thesis

This area examines and judges as to whether or not the thesis fulfilled the intended purpose for which it was started. We undertake this task on the basis of the two research questions which were formulated at the introductory chapter of the study. These questions were: what theological and hermeneutic approach to dialogue is appropriate for constructive Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology as an exercise in learning? How can this form of dialogue lead to the discovery and promotion of common values inspired by Jesus Christ? The focus here is to find out the extent to which the thesis responded to these research questions i.e. what is the thesis’ response to the stated problem in the study? Does it contribute to making Christian-Muslim dialogue more constructive and positive? What is the contribution of the study to the current debates on Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology?

7.2.1. The Thesis' Response to the Stated Problem

The stated problem of the study was the general understanding that Christology is a contentious subject for Christian Muslim relations. Most of these contentious disagreements have often been the cause for Christian-Muslim conflicts in varying degrees in many parts of the world. While some scholars focused on the traditional paradigms and thought it is impossible to engage Christians and Muslims on a constructive dialogue on Christology, our interest was to re-orient Christian-Muslim dialogues from the traditional models of dialogue to dialogue as an exercise in learning. We argued that dialogue as an exercise in learning from and about the other respects the views of the religious other through the interest to learn from them.

In this way, dialogue as an exercise in learning offers Christians and Muslims the opportunity to listen to each other and learn from what the other has to say about Jesus Christ, thereby clarifying the underlying ideological, philosophical and theological prejudices one may hold about the other. Not only does it lead to these clarifications, but it also has the potential to unearth common values between the interlocutors. To achieve this end, we relied on comparative theology as our theological approach to the problem and Ricoeur's hermeneutics on narrative identity as the hermeneutic context for reflecting on the challenges posed by dialogue as an exercise in learning from and about the other.

As a theological approach, comparative theology engages in correlating theological themes, concepts and beliefs between two different religious traditions in order to learn and understand them. In doing this, it emphasizes on the commitment of the theologian to the home tradition and respect for and openness to the traditions of the other. Since its fundamental goal is that of learning, we found it a compelling theological approach to our understanding of dialogue as an exercise in learning. Through narrative identity, Ricoeur helped us to understand that in narrating the story of one's life, one finds that others contribute to our narratives and we theirs.

Since this possibility of narrative intertwinement establishes some form of relationship between the self and the other in contexts where they are considered estranged, we argued that this sense of intersubjectivity provides the hermeneutic framework for

reflecting on Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology as an exercise in learning. For this form of mutual sharing to be constructive and positive, we argued that it has to be guided by what we called “appropriate dialogical attitudes” namely: commitment, respect, openness and the principle of equality. Here, Ricoeur’s “little ethics” provided the hermeneutic context for reflecting on the meaning of and significance of these dialogical attitudes.

As a consequence, the whole methodology of the thesis is centred on the argument that for Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology to be constructive and positive, it needs to be oriented towards dialogue as an exercise in learning from and about the other. Here, difference is respected at the same time that similarities are affirmed where possible. From the entire study therefore, we can say that whereas the stated problem centred on the context of “claim and counterclaim” which often render Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology impossible, we argued for the case of Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology as an exercise in learning which makes dialogues possible.

7.2.2. Significance of the Thesis to Current Debates on Dialogue

The significance of the thesis to current debates in Christian-Muslim dialogue is located in its *approach, method* and *goal*. The approach of the thesis is to be found in the understanding of “dialogue as an exercise in learning”. It is a form of dialogue which engages the narrative discourses of both religious traditions, with the view to learn from and about the other. Consequently, it builds on and encourages commitment to one’s tradition and the openness to listen to, learn and understand the traditions of the other on Christology. Its theological method and hermeneutic approach is that of comparative theology and Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self (narrative identity).

While comparative theology focuses on learning across traditions, Ricoeur’s hermeneutics on narrative identity demonstrates how the narratives of others contribute to our narratives and we theirs. This form of narrative interconnection builds a hermeneutic confidence about the possibility of learning from and about the other. The goal here is to reach a profound knowledge of oneself, acquire an authentic knowledge of the other, and hence be able to live with the other more creatively. Thus, the approach, the method and

the goal of the study sets it out differently from other forms of interfaith dialogue scholarship.

While acknowledging that there are volumes of scholarly contributions on Christian-Muslim dialogues (both Muslim and Christian), most of these works only give tangential treatments to the specific topic of Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology. Even in context where specific attention is paid to the subject of Christology, few of these are oriented towards dialogue as an exercise in learning. In this way, one could therefore say that there are very few scholarly contributions on Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology as an exercise in learning – the kind of dialogue which engages the Christologies of both Christianity and Islam in conversations that are directed towards the promotion of common values inspired by Jesus.

Consequently, the dialogical relevance of this approach to Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology is first informed by its ability to engage the two traditions on conversations about Jesus Christ outside of the “claim and counterclaim” polemics that are usually characteristic of these forms of dialogue. Secondly, not only does dialogue as an exercise in learning emphasize on commitment to the home tradition, it also stresses on the importance of respect and openness to the other’s tradition if one is to learn from and about them. Thirdly, dialogue as an exercise in learning also brings in further freshness to Christian-Muslim dialogues in the way it engages and guides both traditions in a dialogical process which leads to the promotion of common values such as: “prayer and submission to God”, “peace and peaceful co-existence” and “solidarity with the poor and the marginalized”.

7.3. Recommendations for Further Study

At the start of this research work, we reckoned that the entire process was a Christian-Muslim dialogical journey whose goal was about learning from and about the other. Just as the methodological framework provided the roadmap that guided the journey, so also the splendour of the point of destination provided the motivation to keep striving towards the goal. However, having arrived at the goal, we find that the goal of the journey has no definitive end to itself. It rather opens up new beginnings that point to others goals which

beckon for further attention. As Pratt conceptualized, “I often find, in my research and thinking, that where I arrive at is where I should really begin... The end of one journey brings me, but to the start of another”.⁷⁸⁶

It is therefore in view of the new vistas of hope and opportunity for further research in this area that we recommend some other pressing values for further reflections on Christian-Muslim dialogues of life and of common action. These values include: “marriage and family life” in the light of same-sex marriages, “human rights and gender equality” in the light of human rights abuses and gender discrimination, “the integrity of creation” in the light of environmental degradation and “the life of chastity” in the light of prostitution and pornography. These are issues which specifically relate to social and moral values which Christianity and Islam uphold and which the message, life and mission of Jesus Christ could help to clarify and provide common contexts for inter-faith action.

If Christianity and Islam are to be partners in the public discourse on how to make the world a better place, then developing these values will not be out of place. As Ziauddin Sardar puts it, Christian-Muslim actions that are “designed to generate adoptive and pragmatic intellectual responses to the problems of our age would be the most appropriate response of the believers to the postmodernist age”.⁷⁸⁷ In the nutshell, the work that has been accomplished in the thesis is but the foretaste of a work yet to be completed with greater prospects for Christian-Muslim relations. Recourse to praxis is that which can guarantee the achievement of these dialogical values.

⁷⁸⁶ Douglas Pratt. *The Challenge of Islam*. 2005, p228

⁷⁸⁷ Ziauddin Sardar. “The Ethical Connection: Christian-Muslim Relations in Postmodern Age.” 1991, p75

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